

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POLITICAL
ELEMENT IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
RICHARD II

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POLITICAL ELEMENT
IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
RICHARD II

BY



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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English
Memorial University of Newfoundland
July 1985

St. John's

Newfoundland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In carrying out this study, I have benefited immensely by the scholarly and thorough direction of my advisor, Dr. Gordon Jones. Without his help this work might never have been completed. I must also extend gratitude to Dr. Frederick A. Aldrich, Dean of Graduate Studies, who approved my Fellowship, and to Memorial University for making these funds available to me.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the twentieth century, literary critics have largely undervalued the political element inherent in William Shakespeare's Richard II, preferring instead to emphasize its tragic qualities. However, upon close analysis of the text and the period in which it was written one finds that the play's printed and performed popularity owed much to its political content.

With an analogy existing between Queen Elizabeth I and Richard II, writing on the subject of the latter monarch's reign was both a daring and dangerous thing to do in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Yet, Shakespeare was able to write his play with a great deal of current political commentary and political theorizing without any extensive repercussion - even after his play was performed on the eve of the Essex rebellion in 1601. This contrasts starkly with the fate of Dr. John Hayward, who was imprisoned in 1599 until after the death of Elizabeth for employing the analogy to comment on the politics of the day in his prose history Henry VIII.

It is the assertion herein that Shakespeare was able to do so because he carefully balanced his play between tragedy and political theory - a balance permitting Richard II to operate as a cautionary tale within the area of functional ambiguity.

CHAPTER I

THE PREVAILING CRITICAL VIEWPOINTS

Unless the study of topicality, allusion, and censorship can in some way further the larger understanding of a work of literature, the pursuit of such questions becomes self-serving; a pointless exercise in scholarly ingenuity. However, if the pursuit leads to increased understanding of the work as an independent piece of literature, then the endeavour is undoubtedly justified.

A number of areas must be explored to understand the socio-political environment in which a text was produced -- for no author exists in a vacuum. In a work dealing with an historical subject, one must not only examine the historical perspective in which it was written, but also the sources from which it was drawn, and the degree to which the author deviates from those sources to create an original work. Throughout, one must attempt to determine the probable reaction to that text. Such reaction takes both an official and an unofficial form -- the former being censorship of the text, and the latter being public reaction to the text.

This study of reaction becomes doubly complicated when dealing with the drama. While the printed text may well provide evidence of topical allusion or political commentary,

both the performance and the audience's probable reaction to that performance must be considered as well as the text itself. Just as a writer or a reader does not exist in a vacuum, neither does an actor or an audience. Historically, the question of audience reaction becomes even more complicated when one is dealing with a play performed at court, and in front of the individual whose political status requires one to consider closely his probable reaction -- the monarch:

... When the King brought his players to court the nature of the audience changed, as often did the function of the performance. Now there were, popularly speaking, two audiences and two spectacles. The primary audience was the monarch, and the performance was often directed explicitly at him. Thus, early in Queen Elizabeth's reign two political theorists gave the young Queen counsel through the dramatic example of Gorboduc; and later, in The Arraignment of Paris, a poet created for her a crucial role in the mythology of the commonwealth. During such performances what the rest of the spectators watched was not a play but the Queen at a play, and their response would have been not simply to the drama, but to the relationship between the drama and its primary audience, the royal spectator.¹

Hence, to fully understand a text one must fully understand its context.

In the Elizabeth era the position of a dramatist was hardly one to be envied, particularly if he wished to make some form of controversial commentary. Government reprisal was often harsh but inconsistent. The degree of actual

¹Stephen Orgel, The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 9.

censorship fluctuated significantly in terms of the vigorousness with which it was employed and the topics against which it was directed.

Glynne Wickham, in his Early English Stages 1300 to 1600 (1963), has pointed to four different phases of government control of the stage during Shakespeare's productive years. The fifteen-seventies were marked by government suppression of the religious stage; the fifteen-eighties saw the City of London and the church reacting against the court's accretion of licensing power, and the subsequent representation of each of these bodies on a licensing commission; in the fifteen-nineties, the church withdrew completely from any attempts to gain control of the theatre; and the court and city remained in conflict until the court finally took complete control of the plays and players in the first decade of the reign of James I.²

Despite the different groups competing for control of the stage -- and the consequent importance, or perceived importance of the censor -- no amount of accumulated experience or increased bureaucratic machinery could eradicate inconsistencies in the censorship of the drama. With the conflict between church, city, and court combined with the mismanagement of the Master of Revels office, censorship was

²Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages 1300 to 1600 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 79.

sporadic and often subjective, with regulations appearing unexpectedly and falling rapidly into disuse.³

This inconsistency and confusion is perhaps more readily understandable when one looks at the number of people identified by V.C. Gildersleeve as being legally able to interfere with the drama:

... the hierarchy of dramatic rulers ran -- King, Privy Council, Lord Chamberlain, Master of the Revels, and all the higher authorities interfered.⁴

With such a number of people capable of determining what was permissible upon the stage, it is not surprising to find considerable variations in the degree and type of censorship of the texts of any group of plays in the period -- such as in the case of either of Shakespeare's history tetralogies. Further, with censorship based on what was currently topical rather than on a consistent set of restrictions, a playwright had to be careful not to offend any of these officials lest he be subject to some form of legal reprisal.

According to Lily B. Campbell's Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (1947), each of Shakespeare's history plays serves a special purpose in illuminating a

³E.K. Chambers, Notes on the History of the Revels Office under the Tudor (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), p. 86.

⁴Ashley H. Thorndike, Shakespeare's Theatre (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), p. 203.

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particular political problem in the reign of Elizabeth.⁵ When one looks at the issues inherent in Richard II, one finds a number of significant and dangerous analogies and comments which go untouched by the censor. An interesting contradiction immediately arises with the juxtaposition of such assertions as Campbell's with E.K. Chambers' belief that "for topics of political controversy ... there was no room in the Elizabethan theatre."⁶ Yet, upon close scrutiny, it will be seen that much of Richard II's popularity was the result of its relation to current political controversy, and not its distinctive theatrical effectiveness as a tragedy -- as will be shown below.

A further difficulty which arises in looking at any single play in either of Shakespeare's historical tetralogies is determining the degree to which it may be separated from the plays preceding it and following it in these two groupings. The difficulty increases when one notes the critical maxim for the early part of the twentieth century -- initiated by E.M.W. Tillyard in his Shakespeare's History Plays (1944), and reinforced by Lily B. Campbell -- which depicted both

⁵Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (1947; rpt. California: The Huntington Library, 1963), p. 170.

⁶E.K. Chambers, William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 66.

tetralogies as thematically unified in a recapitulation of Tudor doctrine.

However, such a view does not fully acknowledge the fact that these two cycles were written in two different political climates, with much occurring between the first, rather orthodox tetralogy, and the second, more questioning tetralogy. As Irving Ribner stated in "The Political Problem in Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy" (1952):

But what scholars who would emphasize Shakespeare's close adherence to this traditional view -- who would regard Richard II and its followers as written to fill in events needed to complete the earlier historical series -- tend to ignore is that Shakespeare's histories are not one cycle. They are two cycles written at different times, in different ways, and reflecting two different periods of artistic and intellectual maturity.⁷

Between 1572, when the first tetralogy was completed, and ca. 1595, when the second was begun, the question of who should succeed the aging virgin Queen had become of paramount political importance. It is to this question of succession that the second tetralogy -- particularly Richard II -- would seem to address itself.⁸

⁷Irving Ribner, "The Political Problem in Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy," Studies in Philology, 49 (1952); rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Richard II," ed. Paul M. Cubeta (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 32.

⁸Evelyn May Albright, "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy," PMLA, 42 (1927), 688.

And it does so, not in the orthodox and naive manner of Edward Halle's The union of the noble and illustre families of Lancastre and Yorke (1547) -- which the earlier tetralogy does -- but with a newer and bolder spirit. Neither stylistically, nor ideologically is there a consistency of design between the two cycles. The second is, in itself, a tragedy of England in which the fatal error is not the usurpation of the crown, but the actions of the weak and vacillating monarch in Richard II which provoke that usurpation. His reign causes the hurly burly in the two parts of Henry IV, which is only ended in the period of reconciliation and renewal found in the triumphs of the King in Henry V. As Leonard F. Dean stated in his article "Richard II: The State and the Image of the Theatre" (1952):

... the first play is a picture of a sick state in which appearance and reality are at odds, and the last play is a picture of a healthy state in which appearance and reality are unified.⁹

As in the tragedy of a single King, England moves from a period of self-delusion -- characterized by the misconceptions of the monarch in Richard II -- to a period of self-knowledge -- characterized by the self-realization of the monarch in Henry V.

⁹Leonard F. Dean, "Richard II: The State and the Image of the Theatre," PMLA, 67 (1952), 211.

Thus, if, on a thematic level the Lancastrian tetralogy ends with Henry V, and not with Richard III, then Tillyard's assertion of a necessary intrinsic order behind all of the plays can certainly be questioned. As recently as 1982, H.R. Coursen, in The Leasing Out of England: Shakespeare's Second Henriad, argued:

... once the England of Gaunt's great speech has been ended by King Richard's actions, the country becomes increasingly dominated by a version of Social Darwinism. The characters inhabiting the world of these plays are no longer "placed" in an inherited social hierarchy, but must compete with each other in a world drained of intrinsic value.¹⁰

In such a light the second tetralogy can hardly be seen as a recapitulation of the Tudor myth of passive obedience to an existent social hierarchy. Further, if the illness inherent in that social hierarchy is depicted in the first play of the series, then it follows that the first play should contain the most striking examples considered topical in a political culture based on such a myth.

This is not to assert that Shakespeare is so bold or so radical as to attack the Tudor principles of hierarchy directly. Rather, the order of the past is juxtaposed with the political realities of the present; and nowhere in the

¹⁰H.R. Coursen, The Leasing Out of England: Shakespeare's Second Henriad (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), p. 4.

canon is this more forcibly done than in Richard II, H.R. Coursen noted that when one finds Tudor doctrine in the play:

... it is a moderate position between the extremities of rebellion, and it is expressed by thoughtful selfless men. We might be tempted to label it Shakespeare's view, if we did not also perceive that the doctrine is continually placed in ironic conflict with harsh political realities.¹¹

Twentieth-century critics have, on the whole, undervalued such political elements in the play, viewing it as something of a flawed tragedy -- particularly by comparing it to Shakespeare's later, more developed tragedies. Yet, while many of their specific criticisms are valid, a pattern concerning the overall interpretation of Richard II arises when one notes their emphasis.

The earliest, and perhaps most dismissive critic of the play was Dr. Johnson, who felt that it could not "be said much to affect the passions or enlarge the understanding."¹² Though less immediately dismissive of the value of Richard II, E.K. Chambers felt the play inferior to the other plays of the mature tetralogy: "... there is much poor and bombastic matter, especially in Acts I and IV, which recalls the period

¹¹Coursen, p. 6.

¹²John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare (London: Macmillan Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 167.

of 2, 3 Henry VI and Richard III.¹³ He further emphasized the play's similarities to traditional treatments of the story:

Shakespeare, completely uninterested in chronicle-history as such, allowed himself to slip into a perfunctory and traditional treatment of all that was not directly concerned with the tragedy.¹⁴

And after a brief chronological account of the Essex situation, Chambers dismissed any possible current political relevance in the play, concluding:

That it was written with any seditious intent is of course most unlikely, and indeed only an unreasonably sensitive instinct of suspicion could regard the deposition scene in particular as encouraging resentment against Richard.¹⁵

Perhaps the most influential critic of the history plays, E.M.W. Tillyard, found much more to value in the play, but only in so far as it was the first part of the tetralogy:

Richard II is imperfectly executed, and yet, that imperfection granted, perfectly planned as part of a great structure ... [it] therefore betokens no relapse but is an organic part of one of Shakespeare's major achievements.¹⁶

¹³Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 351.

¹⁴Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 352.

¹⁵Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 355.

¹⁶E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (1944; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 244, 245.

He, too, found inadequacy in the play's verse, particularly when compared with the other plays of the canon:

But the imperfections are undoubted and must be faced. As a specific play Richard II lacks the sustained vitality of Richard III, being less interesting and less exacting in structure and containing a good deal of verse which by the best Shakespearian standards can only be called indifferent. Not that there is anything wrong with the structure, which is that of Henry VI, the rise of one great man at the expense of another; but it is simple, as befits an exordium, and does not serve through the excitement of its complications to make the utmost demand on the powers of the author.¹⁷

Notably, whenever Tillyard refers to the play's topical appeal, it is only in terms of style and dress;¹⁸ he does not mention any of the play's political relevance to an Elizabethan audience.

Tillyard's contemporary, Lily B. Campbell, must be applauded for her appreciation of the political applicability of the story; and yet she is influenced by Tillyard's emphasis on the inseparability of the plays from the rest of the tetralogy. Indeed, the title of her chapter concerning Richard II is "An Introduction into the Division between Lancaster and York."¹⁹ Further, while Campbell does discuss the political applicability of the story, her emphasis on the

¹⁷Tillyard, p. 245.

¹⁸Tillyard, p. 255.

¹⁹Campbell, p. 168.

play's close adherence to Tudor doctrine causes her to conclude that:

In the play Shakespeare reiterated the charges against Richard that had been so often laid at Queen Elizabeth's door. He adjudged Richard guilty of sinful folly, but Gaunt and Richard himself and Carlisle, all the sympathetic characters, insist that "God's is the quarrel," that a subject may not give sentence on his king.²⁰

Undoubtedly this helped to influence John Dover Wilson's 1951 introduction to the play, where the political element of Richard II is seen as only the backdrop for Richard's personal tragedy:

... the political situation that he dealt with was merely the material for drama. He takes sides neither with Richard nor Bolingbroke; he exhibits without concealment the weakness of the king's character, but he spares no pains to evoke our whole-hearted pity for him in his fall.²¹

All of these critics value the play in varying degrees for a number of quite similar reasons. Primarily -- and perhaps this is because of the title of the 1597 Quarto -- they see the play as a tragedy of Richard II: not on its own highly political terms, but on the terms of Richard III and the later, more mature tragedies. While such comparisons are

²⁰Campbell, p. 211.

²¹John Dover Wilson, ed., King Richard II, The New Shakespeare (1939; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. xxxv.

necessary in an evaluation of the play in terms of the rest of the canon, in twentieth-century criticism of Richard II there is a reluctance to separate it from the other plays of the second tetralogy, or the plays of the previous tetralogy. Nowhere is this more evident than in Stanley Wells' 1969 introduction to the New Penguin edition, where he describes the play as:

... a real starting point, for Richard was the last King of England to rule by direct and undisputed succession from William the Conqueror. Bolingbroke's usurpation of his throne set in motion the train of events which was finally expiated by the union of the houses of York and Lancaster celebrated in the last speech of Richard III.²²

Combining this reluctance to separate Richard II from the other plays in the tetralogies with the critical maxim discussed above has led critics to undervalue the political discussions in the play as simply being part of an overall recapitulation of Tudor doctrine. The political element is seen as secondary, as simply providing the material for character development; and consequently the play is referred to as a tragedy also concerned with the deposition of a king.

And even this emphasis is incorrect. To see Richard II as politically centering solely around the sin of Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne, rather than exploring the possible necessity of such action, is to bypass Richard's misdeeds in

²²Stanley Wells, ed., King Richard II, The New Penguin Shakespeare (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 10.

the first half of the play and concentrate on the sympathy evoked by his poetic posturing in the second.

John Dover Wilson, though generally more cognisant than the other critics of the political element inherent in Richard II, must ultimately be admitted as an example of this overemphasis on the sin of usurpation and underemphasis on the existing sickness of the land under Richard:

... the fall of Richard fascinated the late Medieval and Elizabethan world as much by its magnitude and its unaccountableness as by its pathos and the sacrilege that brought it to pass:

Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon,
Wanting the manage of unruly jades,
are words which Shakespeare places in his mouth, and some critics have taken as the key-note of the play.²³

In this very same introduction, Wilson himself becomes one of these "some critics" by stressing the point that:

... Shakespeare and his contemporaries, rejoicing in the Tudor peace and looking back with horror to the period of civil strife, known as the War of the Roses, which preceded the accession of Henry VII, were haunted by fears of such anarchy, and found its origin in the last few years of Richard II's reign. And rightly so; for the deposition and murder of Richard not only shocked the conscience of Christendom, they struck at the legal basis of the monarchical, that is to say the whole constitutional system of England.²⁴

²³Wilson, p. xix.

²⁴Wilson, pp. xxii, xxiii.

If such were the case, however, would it not be in the interest of those supporting the Tudor doctrine (i.e. those in power) to promote the dramatization of the story? If, as is commonly asserted, an Elizabethan audience would view in Richard's deposition a violent crime against God that would bring about one hundred years of civil strife, why then would the followers of the Earl of Essex have it staged on the eve of the 1601 rebellion?

Perhaps the modern critical attitude toward Richard II may be better understood if one recalls that upon first viewing and reading the play one is indeed fascinated by the figure of Richard in his decline. In effect, such a simple and emotional story causes one to forget that the setting is high politics. Yet upon close scrutiny, one finds that:

... the fact that Richard is a king not only enhances the pathos of his fall, but sets him in a political environment in which the dramatist is not seldom interested for its own sake ... To Shakespeare's audience its political significance was immediate and tremendous ... by far the most topical play of the period.²⁵

As has been noted, critics have tended to look at the political element of the play not in its own right, but as illuminating two different character types. In such an apolitical light, and in the reflection of the other, less political tragedies, one may well accept the critical complaints

²⁵Ribner, p. 80.

about "poor and bombastic matter," and "lack of sustained vitality." But it will be seen that Richard II is not a tragedy in the traditional sense. The juxtaposing of Richard and Bolingbroke expresses antithetical approaches to a modern political world; and an antithesis which directly relates to political concerns at the time it was written and performed. Thus, Richard II is not simply a subordinate unit to the other history plays, nor the tragedy of a wayward king, but rather a discursive "political" tragedy which deals with the very political fabric of England herself.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAY IN ELIZABETHAN LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

That the story of Richard's downfall was quite popular to the Elizabethan reader and play-goer throughout the last decade of the sixteenth century would seem to be evidenced by the proliferation of texts by different authors concerning the subject. The general twentieth century critical interpretation of this is once again greatly influenced by E.M.W. Tillyard, who viewed the Elizabethan mind - and contemporary minds abroad - as understanding the figure and reign of Richard II in mystical terms:

... In an age that was both passionately admiring of royal magnificence and far more retentive of tradition than our own, the glories of Richard's court must have persisted as legend.¹

As recently as 1961, John Palmer, in his Political Characters of Shakespeare, continued this line of interpretation by emphasizing that not only in the glory of his reign, but also in the tragedy of his fall did Richard epitomise a figure of royal self-indulgence and martyrdom:

His deposition had acquired a mystical significance. For over two centuries he had stood to poets and

¹Tillyard, p. 255.

historians, both in England and in France, for a supreme example of that tragic fall of princes which appealed so strongly to the imagination and the conscience of the post-mediaeval world.²

However, while one may assert that the story itself was to the popular taste, it would seem rather extreme to accept that merely the "mystical proportions" of a two century old story explains why it was retold, printed and performed so often near the end of Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, much of the twentieth century criticism of the subject seems clouded by the imposition of a loyalist spirit upon the Elizabethan mind; and nowhere does this seem more prevalent than in Wilson's introduction to the New Shakespeare edition:

... he stood in the eyes of the later middle ages as the type, and exemplar of royal martyrdom; of a king not slain in battle, not defeated and killed by a foreign adversary, not even deposed owing to weakness or tyranny in favour of his heir, but thrust from the throne in his may of youth by a mere usurper, under colour of process at law utterly illegal, and then foully murdered.³

Perhaps the popularity of the subject is more readily understandable when one takes into account the analogy between Queen Elizabeth and Richard II - an analogy which had existed long before Shakespeare wrote his work, and which would grow in topicality and subsequent importance thereafter.

²Palmer, p. 120.

³Wilson, p. xvi.

In her article "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy" (1927), Evelyn May Albright noted that, as early as 1578, one finds a reference to the analogy in a letter from Sir Francis Knolly's - a relative and counselor to the Queen - to her secretary:

for who woll persiste in gyvinge of safe counsayle, if her Majestie woll persiste in mislyking, of safe counsayle? Nay who woll not rather shrynkingly (that I may say no worse) play for the partes of King Richard the Second's men, then to enter, into the odious office of crossing of her Majesties wylle?

If the Bishop of Canterbury be deprived;

... then up startes the pryde and practise of the papistes, and downe declyneth the comforte and strengthe of her Majesties safety. And then King Richard the Second's men woll flock into courte apace, and woll show themselves in theyre true colors. From which companie the Lord blesse her Majestie, and the thynking thereon doth so abhorre me, that I am more fytt to dye in a pryvate lyfe, than to live, a courtier.⁴

Whether the secretary made the letter known to the Queen, as Knollys requested, remains uncertain; however, this reference to "King Richard the Second's men" is repeated before 1588 by Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon. Although the Queen's nearest kinsman, he lacked advancement to the earldom to which he thought himself entitled and referred to his want of influence

⁴Albright, p. 691.

at court as being caused by the fact that "I was never one of Richard II's men."⁵

Thus, as Albright points out, by 1590 the grandfather of the Earl of Essex - Sir Francis Knollys, as well as his great-uncle - Lord Hunsdon (who was also a patron of Shakespeare's company), had unfavourably acknowledged the analogy. (Richard Simpson, it should be noted, stated in 1874 that by 1590 the Queen was so sensitive to political allusion that she ordered Holinshed's Chronicles (1577) suppressed.⁶)

While some critics - notably Ray Heffner in his article written in response to Miss Albright's entitled "Shakespeare, Hayward, and Essex" (1930) - see such references as "nothing more than coincidence - it just so happened that the names came together,"⁷ the majority have admitted the existence of the analogy. However, even this critical acceptance seems tinged by something of a royalist spirit which softens the edge of such references. Perhaps the earliest and most influential expression of such a spirit is found in E.K. Chambers' William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems (1930):

⁵Albright, p. 691.

⁶Richard Simpson, in The Life and Death of King Richard the Second, The Variorum Shakespeare, ed. Matthew W. Black (London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1955), p. 583.

⁷Ray Heffner, "Shakespeare, Hayward, and Essex," PMLA, 45 (1930), 768.

... All these allusions are of course in perfect loyalty, the utterances of devoted, if critical, officials ... In 1598 a disgruntled Essex drifted into an attitude of political opposition, and the government became or professed to become aware of an unfriendly parallel drawn between Elizabeth herself and the deposed Richard.⁸

Whether or not Elizabeth knew of the analogy before the government professed to become aware of it in 1598 is uncertain, but as has been seen the analogy had been noted, and it is unlikely to be coincidental that 1598 not only witnessed the actions of a disgruntled Essex, but also saw two quarto editions of Shakespeare's Richard II published - a rate of publication the playwright would only equal with Pericles⁹ (1608). Lawrence Samuel Friedman, in his article "Kingship and Politics in Shakespeare's Richard II" (1967) stated that:

Elizabethan England inherited not only the "Tudor myth," but also the traditional English respect for natural law and the rights of subjects. In seizing the throne Bolingbroke pays lip service to the notion of popular sovereignty; John Fortescue, the most prominent English Jurist of the fifteenth century, consistently relies on Aquinas in showing that men owe ultimate allegiance to God; and John Ponet, one of the most vociferous Marian exiles, goes further and argues that regicide is permissible

⁸Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 353.

⁹Peter Ure, ed., King Richard II: The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (1961; rpt. London: Methuen, 1982), p. xiv.

if the ruler's commands are contrary to those of God.¹⁰

This is not, of course, to make the absurd assumption that the officials employing the analogy were dangerous rebels filled with seditious intent; rather, the inclusion of this information is meant to emphasize that when modern critics (such as E.K. Chambers) superimpose their loyalist views upon these references, it is often at the expense of what these references imply in terms of the analogy.

Certainly it must be admitted that much of the printed material dealing with this particularly popular story would hardly be considered generous to the politics and character of Richard II. It is true too, however, that while the analogy between Richard and Elizabeth may well have been present and known, it does not seem to grow sufficiently in topicality until after 1597 to make it a highly censorable question for the authorities - that is to say it is not taken by the official censor as censorable material; particularly when many of the early works present the story critically, but in a Tudor tradition of concern for the good of England rather than any individual.

As early as 1561, Gorboduc - which contains such political crosscurrents as those mentioned by Friedman -

¹⁰Lawrence Samuel Friedman, "Kingship and Politics in Shakespeare's Richard II," DA, 27 (1967), 3007A.

ends not on a note of rebellion, but on a note which has been described as an "allegorical plea"¹¹ for Elizabeth to avoid future disaster by fixing the succession to her throne:

Eubulus.

Lo, here the end of Brutus' royal line,
And lo, the entry to the woeful wreck
And utter ruin of this noble realm.
The royal king and eke his sons are slain;
No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the scepter 'longs, unknown;
That to each force of foreign prince's power,
Whom vantage of our wretched state may move
By sudden arms to gain so rich a realm,
And to the proud and greedy mind at home
Whom blinded lust to reign leads to aspire,
Lo, Britain realm is left an open prey,
A present spoil by conquest to ensue.¹²
(V, ii, 180-192)

This question of the succession had been raised publicly by the Commons in 1559, and received the following response from Elizabeth:

For I assure you - what credit my assurance may have with you I cannot tell, but what credit I shall deserve to have the sequence shall declare - I will never in that matter conclude anything that shall be prejudicial to the realm, for the well, good, and safety whereof I will never shun to spend my life. And whomsoever my chance shall be to light upon, I trust he shall be as careful for the realm and you - I will not say as myself, because I cannot so certainly determine of any other; but at the

¹¹Friedman, p. 3007A.

¹²Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex, ed. Irving B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), pp. 70-71.

least ways, by my good will and desire he shall be such as shall be as careful for the preservation of the realm and you as myself.

And albeit it might please Almighty God to continue me still in this mind to live out of the state of marriage, yet it is not to be feared but He will so work in my heart and in your wisdoms as good provision by His help may be made in convenient time, whereby the realm shall not remain destitute of an heir that may be a fit governor, and peradventure more beneficial to the realm than such offspring as may come of me.¹³

An element of political scepticism - or at least realism - must be admitted to some degree in all of the works dealing with Richard; and it is expressing concern not only in terms of the succession. In this same time period, 1559-1563, The Mirror for Magistrates treats the story in a fashion that can hardly be labeled sympathetic.¹⁴ The first five of the 'sundry unfortunate Englishe men' who deliver their laments are Richard and those around him:

I am a kyng that ruled all by lust,
That finced not of vertue, ryght, or lawe,
But always put false Flatterers most in trust,
Enaving such as could my vices claue:
By faythful covnsayle passing not a strawe,
What pleasvre pryckt, that I to be ivst.
I set my minde, to feede, to spoyle, to lust,
Three meales a day could skarce content my mawe,

¹³Queen Elizabeth I, "The Reply of Elizabeth to the House of Commons Touching the Succession," in Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex, ed. Irving B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 76.

¹⁴Wilson, p. xviii.

And all to avgment my lecherous minde that mvst
To Venus pleasvres always be in awe.

For mayntenavnce whereof, my realme I polde
Through subsidies, sore fines, loanes, many a preat
Blanke charters, othes, and shifts not known of old,
For whych, my Subiectes did me sore detest
I also made away the towne of Brest,
My fault wherein because mine vnclie tolde
(For Prynces vyces may not be controlde)
I found the meanes his bowels to Vnbrest.
The piers and Lords that did his cause vpholde,
With death, exile, or grieuous fines opprest.¹⁵
Tragedy 5; 31-50

A similarly unflattering portrait of Richard is painted in the anonymous play Thomas of Woodstock (1591), in which the king shows every disregard for England and the crown, and gives himself up to 'wild and antic labels': 'falling prey to flatterers, aping foreign manners, farming the fortunes of the realm, and pursuing his own self-indulgence. S. Schoenbaum, in "Richard II and the Realities of Power" (1975) noted that the pejorative most frequently attached to him in Woodstock is "wanton," and he eventually becomes "wanton tyrant".¹⁶ Friedman goes so far as to see it as fully condoning the spectacle of rebellion:

... After an exhaustive account of the sins of Richard II and his followers and of the king's lack of concern

¹⁵The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 113-114.

¹⁶S. Schoenbaum, "Richard II and the Realities of Power," Shakespeare Studies, 18 (1975), p. 55.

for England, the reader is convinced of the rightness and necessity of the successful rebellion.¹⁷

Jack Straw (1593) deals in a far more loyalist spirit with the subject of rebellion - however, it is with the revolt of 1381 and not the deposition of Richard that it concerns itself. The rebels are depicted as ignorant and misguided and Richard - although admittedly influenced by his favourites - is presented as "the gladsome sunne-shine in a winter's day" magnanimously providing pardon to all but the leaders of traitorous rebellion:¹⁸

Usher.

True Madam, for your Graces sonne the King,
Is so well ruled by divers of his Pieres,
As that I thinke the prowdest foe he hath,
Shall find moe worke than he will take in hand,
That seeks the downfall of his Maiestie:
I hope the Councell are too wise for that,
To suffer Rebels in aspiring pride,
That purpose treason to the Prince and State!¹⁹
(I, iv, 326-333)

Such orthodox Tudor attitudes toward rebellion were undoubtedly greatly influenced by the primary historical source of the period, Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland (1577). While providing a

¹⁷Friedman, p. 15.

¹⁸Schoenbaum, p. 54.

¹⁹The Life and Death of Jack Straw, ed. Kenneth Muir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 11.

lucid and fairly objective view of Richard's wrongs and deposition, Holinshed provides the following statement at the end of his account of Richard II's reign:

But if I may boldlie saie what I thinke: he was a prince the most vnthankfullie vsed of his subiects, of any one of whom ye shall lightlie read. For although (through the frailtie of youth) he demeaned himselfe more dissolutelie than seemed conuenient for his roiall estate, and made choise of such counsellors as were not fauored of the people, whereby he was the lesse fauored himselfe: yet in no kings daies were the commons in greater wealth, if they could haue perceiued their happie state: neither in any other time were the nobles and gentlemen more cherished, nor churchmen lesse wronged. But such was their ingratitude towards their bountifull and loving sovereigne, that those whom he had cheeflie advanced, were readiest to controll him; for that they might not rule all things at their will, and remooue from him such as they misliked, and place in their roomes whom they thought good, and that rather by strong hand than by gentle and courteous meanes, which stirred such malice betwixt him and them, till at length it could not be asswaged without perill of destruction to them both.

The duke of Gloucester cheefe instrument of this mischeefe, to what end he came ye haue heard. And although his nephue the duke of Hereford tooke vpon him to revenge his death, yet wanted he moderation and loialtie in his dooings, for the which both himselfe and his lineall race were scourged afterwards, as a due punishment vnto rebellious subiects; so as deserved vengeance seemed not to staie long for his ambitious crueltie; that thought it not inough to driue King Richard to resigne his crowne and regall dignitie ouer vnto him, except he also should take from him his guiltlesse life: What vnnaturalnesse, or rather what tigerlike crueltie was this, not to be content with his principallitie? not to be content with his treasure? not to be content with his deprivation? not to be content with his imprisonment? but being so neere lie knit in consanguinitie, which ought to haue moued them like lambs to haue loued each other, wooleshlie to lie in wait for the distressed creatures life, and rauenshlie to thirst after his blood, the spilling whereof should haue touched his conscience so, as that death ought rather to haue

beene aduentured for his safetie, than so sauagellie
to haue sought his life after the losse of his roialtie.²⁰

Samuel Daniel's The Civil Wars (1595) would also seem
to follow in such a vein of thought; the first edition of the
work is dedicated in all-fealty to the Queen:

HEre sacred Sovereigne, glorious Queene of Peace,
The tumults of disordered times I sing,
To glorifie thy Raigne, and to increase
The wonder of those blessings thou doost bring
Vpon thy Land, which ioyes th' intire release
From bloud and sorrowes by thy gouerning,
That through affliction we do see our ioyes,
And blesse the glory of Elizaes dayes.²¹

Yet, even within a work such as this, one finds a degree
of political realism imparted - and imparted, perhaps, in
not so wholly innocent a spirit as one would initially suspect:

And Courts were neuer barren yet of those
Which could with subtile traine, and apt aduice,
Worke on the Princes weaknesse, and dispose
Of feeble frailtie, easie to entice.
And such, no doubt, about this King arose,
Whose flatterie (the dangerous nurse of vice)
Got hand vpon his youth, to pleasures bent;
Which, led by them, did others discontent.²²
(Book I, verse 31)

²⁰Raphael Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland
and Ireland, II (1577; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc.,
1965), p. 869.

²¹Samuel Daniel, The Civil Wars, ed. Laurence Michel
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 65.

²²Daniel, The Civil Wars, p. 79.

Albright goes so far as to state that Daniel was a known Essex sympathizer, basing her assertion on the trouble caused when the poet published his play Philotus in 1605.²³ Daniel rather hotly denied any connection with the escapades of the Earl, writing in a letter as late as 1604 to the Earl of Devonshire that:

first I tolde the Lördes I had written 3 Actes of this tragedie the Christmas before my L. of Essex troubles, as diuers in the cittie could wites. I saide the maister of the Revells had p'vied it. I said I had read some part of it to yo^r ho: and this I said having none els of powre to grace mee now in Corte & hoping y^t yo^u out of yo^r knowledge of bookes, or favor of letters & mee, might answer that there is nothing in it disagreeing nor anything, as I protest there is not, but out of the vniuersall notions of ambition and envie, the p'petuall arguments of bookes or tragedies.²⁴

Daniel must have been taken at his word, for the State Papers under "January 31, 1604" indicate that he had been previously appointed in some fashion to the licensing of plays:

Grant to Edward Kirkham, Alexander Hawkins, Thos. Kendall and Robert Payne, of license to train up children, to be called 'Children of the Revels to the Queen,' and to exercise them in playing within the Blackfriars in London, or elsewhere; all plays to be allowed by Sam. Danyell.²⁵

²³Albright, p. 713.

²⁴Samuel Daniel, The Complete Works in Verse and Prose, ed. A.B. Grosart (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. xxiii.

²⁵Daniel, Complete Works, p. xxiv.

That the difficulties over Philotas and the Essex situation were not professionally deleterious to the poet is evidenced by the entry under "July 10, 1615":

Sir Geo. Buck to John Packer, Secretary to the Lord Chamberlain Somerset. The King has been pleased at the mediation of the Queen on behalf of Sam. Danyell, to appoint a company of youths to perform comedies and tragedies at Bristol, under the name of the Youths of Her Majesty's Royal Chamber of Bristol. Has consented to it as being without prejudice to the rights of his office.²⁶

Thus, when one returns to The Civil Wars of 1595, and reads the epistle and occasional areas of political philosophizing, it is rather difficult for one to determine its degree of topicality. It must be noted, however, that the epistle of the 1595 edition - written before the death of Elizabeth - differs significantly in its concern over the succession from the epistle of the 1609 edition - written after her death:

And, whereas this Argument was long since vndertaken (in a time which was not so well secur'd of the future, as God be blessed now it is) with a purpose, to shoue the deformities of Ciuile Dissension, and the miserable euent of Rebellions, Conspiracies, and bloody Revengements, which followed (as in a circle) vpon that breach of the due course of Succession, by the Vsurpation of Hen. 4; and thereby to make the blessings of Peace, and the happinesse of an established Government (in a direct Line) the better to appeare: I trust I shall doo a gratefull worke to my Countrie, to continue the same, vnto the glorious

²⁶Daniel, Complete Works, p. xxiv.

Union of Hen. 7: from whence is descended our present
Happinesse.²⁷

In 1595, Daniel could not be so bold about the succession, and one is left only conjecture concerning his possible sympathies with the Earl of Essex. What is certain is that by the time of Shakespeare's first Richard II quarto in 1597 quite a number of recent works had presented the reign with a degree of political realism.

And that his presentation of the subject was popular is certainly evidenced by the publication of two more quartos in 1598, one in 1608, and another in 1615. It would seem that by 1597 the deposing of Richard - or at least of a monarch - was considered a dangerous subject, for the deposition scene is absent from the quartos published during Elizabeth's life, and is present in the ones thereafter. A.W. Pollard has asserted that this episode is likely to have been performed on the stage, but was cut from the manuscript as sent to the printer, probably because the political climate in 1597 was such as to make dethronement a sensitive subject.²⁸ Whether it was cut by Shakespeare or the censor remains uncertain.²⁹

²⁷Wilson, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

²⁸Ure, p. xiv.

²⁹Matthew W. Black, ed., The Life and Death of King Richard the Second, The Variorum Shakespeare (London: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1955), pp. 369-376.

It is interesting that Daniel's 1595 edition of The Civil Wars did contain a deposition; and it is a deposition scene not unlike Shakespeare's:

110.

There, he his Subiectes all, (in generall)
 Assoyles and quites of oath and fealtie,
 Renounces interest, title, right and all
 That appertained to kingly dignitie;
 Subscribes thereto, and doth to witnesse call
 Both heauen and earth, and God, & Saints on hie,
 To testifie his act, and doth professe
 To do the same with most free willingnesse.

111.

Tis said, with his owne hands he gaue the Crowne
 To Lancaster, and wisht to God he might
 Haue better ioy thereof than he had knowne
 And that his power might make it his by right;
 And furthermore he crav'd, of all his owne,
 But life, to live apart a private wight;
 The vanity of Greatness he had tri'd,
 And how vnsurely stands the foote of pride.³⁰
 (Books 2, Verses 110, 111)

It would seem that between 1595, when Daniel could publish such a scene, and 1597 when Shakespeare did not publish his, the deposing of a monarch grew in sensitivity to such a degree that it could not be described in published form. It is not until 1599, with the publication of Dr. John Hayward's Henry VIII that one finds a direct description of the act of deposition; Hayward has Richard speak the following words:

³⁰Daniel, The Civil Wars, p. 127.

...I willingly yeeld to your desires, and am heere come to dispossesse my selfe of all pvblike authoritie and title, and to make it free and lawfull for you to create for your King, Henrie, Duke of Lancaster my covsin germaine, whom I know to bee as worthe to take that place, as I see you willing to giue it to him.³¹

Given the popularity of Hayward's work - some 500-600 copies sold in three weeks³² - as well as the trouble he was to find himself in both for the dedication of his work and his manipulation of history to comment on the current political situation (as will be seen below), it would certainly seem that the subject of Richard II had increased in topicality by 1599. While undoubtedly this topicality owed much to the overt actions of Essex, the analogy had been in place for some time before Shakespeare's work was published; and much would have to be written, published, and performed before Queen Elizabeth would reportedly cry out in 1601, "I am Richard II, know ye not that?"³³.

³¹John Hayward, The First Part of the Life and Raigne of Henrie IIII (1599; rpt. London: Huntington Library, n.d.), pp. 87-88.

³²Albright, p. 701.

³³Black, p. 643.

CHAPTER III

THE DATE AND ORIGINALITY OF COMPOSITION

With the presence of a 1595 deposition scene in Daniel, and the absence of one in Shakespeare's first Quarto of 1597, the question of the date of composition and earliest performance of Richard II becomes a pertinent area of inquiry. Both Hardin Craig in his introduction to The Complete Works of Shakespeare (1951) and David Bevington in his revised edition (1973) agree that on stylistic grounds the play may well date from 1595, or earlier:

The play has a disproportionately large amount of rhyme for a date so late as 1595. This may possibly be accounted for on the grounds that rhyme, being a conscious feature of composition, may be due to reaction or to some passing literary influence. Rhyme militates against the speech-ending test and, in some measure, against feminine endings. Richard II is accordingly not high in either of these respects; on the other hand, it has a full number of extra syllables in the mid-line position. There is also a good deal of the rhetorical type of blank verse, many verbal conceits, puns and epigrams, qualities which are characteristic of Shakespeare's early work. But Shakespeare puts this kind of language mainly into the mouths of Richard and of Gaunt, as if for the purpose of marking them off from other characters.

¹Hardin Craig, ed., The Complete Works of Shakespeare (1951; rpt. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1961), p. 643.

There is admittedly a certain lack of precision in dating a play on stylistic grounds; and one must turn to external evidence for a more definitive reply to an inquiry concerning the date of composition and the subsequent date of earliest performance. One particular piece of evidence, first available in printed form as early as 1894,² but not referred to critically until Chambers used it in The Elizabethan Stage³ (1923) is a 1595 letter from Sir Edward Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil (son of William Cecil, Guardian of Essex):

Sir, findinge that you wer not convenientlie to be at London to morrow night I am bold to send to knowe whether Teusdaie <9 Dec.> may be anie more in your grace to visit poore Channon rowe where as late as it shal please you a gate for your supper shal be open: & K. Richard present him selfe to your vewe. Pardon my boldnes that ever love be honored with your presence nether do I importune more then your occasions may willingly assent unto, in the meane time & ever resting At your command
Edw. Hoby. [Endorse] 7 Dec. 1595 [and] readile.⁴

Noted twentieth century critics Kenneth Muir⁵ and John Dover Wilson⁶ have endorsed the letter as a means of dating the play, with Wilson going so far as to state:

²David M. Bergeron, "The Hoby Letter and Richard II.," Shakespeare Quarterly, 26 (1975), 477.

³E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage (1945; rpt. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 194.

⁴Ure, p. xxx.

⁵Muir, p. xxii.

⁶Wilson, p. ix.

Robert Cecil, already associated with his father Burghley as Secretary of State, accepted the invitation and witnessed the performance of what cannot, therefore, at that date have been considered treasonable drama. Notice too, in passing, the picture which Hoby calls up, of cooks and players (including no doubt Shakespeare) all agog for the great man's entertainment, waiting into the night for the porter's word of his arrival at the gate.

A group of less eminent (and doubtless less romantic) critics have seen the reference in a more ambiguous light, claiming that it cannot in any way prove a performance of Shakespeare's Richard II. As G.L. Kitteridge first pointed out in 1936:

If Hoby was referring to a dramatic entertainment (as may or may not be the case) nothing proves that he had Shakespeare's play in mind, for there were other dramas in existence dealing with the same reign; nor is it certain that some Richard III was not the piece in question.⁸

Although apparently without knowledge of this assertion by Kitteridge,⁹ C.A. Greer in his article "The Date of Richard II"¹⁰ (1950), and I.A. Shapiro in his article "Richard II or Richard III or ...?"¹¹ (1958) also pointed to the ambiguity

⁷Wilson, p. ix.

⁸G.L. Kitteridge, The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Boston: Ginn, 1936), p. 479.

⁹Berenson, p. 477.

¹⁰C.A. Greer, "The Date of Richard II," Notes and Queries, 195 (1950), 402-404.

¹¹I.A. Shapiro, "Richard II or Richard III or ...?" Shakespeare Quarterly, 9 (1958), 204-206.

of the Hoby reference. Further, while accepting the Hoby letter as evidence in the 1956 edition of the Arden Shakespeare, Peter Ure admits in the 1961 edition that it may well have been referring to Richard III, Woodstock, Jack Straw or some other play containing a King Richard.¹²

A.N. Kincaid, in his article "Sir Edward Hoby and K. Richard: Shakespeare Play or Morton Tract?" (1981) goes so far as to assert the impossibility of any full length performance on the grounds that a formal banquet is incongruous with the circumstances. He claims that because the entertainment was to be held at Hoby's town house (not at the Busham Estate where he received the Queen), because of the uncertainty of Cecil's attendance and the absence of a time of arrival, and because of the short notice (two days), Hoby was probably providing a private, informal supper. Kincaid suggests that it is therefore more likely that the reference to "K. Richard" concerns a portrait (which Hoby collected), a work Hoby himself may have written on either of the K. Richards, or the non-extant but often referred to pamphlet by Dr. John Morton, Bishop of Ely, which reputedly provided the basis for his pupil, Sir Thomas More, to write his History of Richard III.¹³

¹²Ure, p. xxx.

¹³A.N. Kincaid, "Sir Edward Hoby and K. Richard: Shakespeare Play or Morton Tract?" Notes and Queries, 226 (1981), 124.

While the possibilities of this final point may be debated, the ambiguity of the Hoby reference cannot be denied. It should here be noted, that in emphasizing the existence of the Morton Tract, Kincaid points to the closely knit circle concerned with literature in Elizabethan England:

... In 1596, a few months after writing to Cecil of 'K. Richard,' Hoby embarked on the Cadiz expedition. With him in the Ark Raleigh was George Buck, Master of Revels, author of several minor literary and considerable historical works. Buck, another Cecil adherent was at some stage a member of Hoby's learned circle ... and the two had many friends among antiquarian scholars.¹⁴

A similar insistence on the smallness of this circle is made by Evelyn May Albright in her previously mentioned article "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy" (1927). In attempting to prove the 1595 date of composition she admits the Hoby letter to be "a bit cryptic" but goes on to state that according to one of Hoby's arch-enemies, Dean Howell of Paul's, the closest friends of Hoby were the Lord Treasurer, the Lord Admiral, and the Lord Chamberlain. She suggests that friendship with the Lord Chamberlain may well imply that the "K. Richard" is actually Shakespeare's Richard II; and she implies that Hoby had a particular interest in topical drama:

... Hoby's interest in plays of contemporary political application is suggested by a letter he wrote to

¹⁴Kincaid, p. 125.

Sir Thomas Edmondes March 7, 1605, concerning the committing of several to Bridewell for political offense in Day's Ile of Gulls, where "from the highest to the lowest all men's parts were acted of two diverse nations."¹⁵

While this is a decade after the 1595 date, a letter which Albright notes from Sir Walter Raleigh to Cecil dated July 6, 1597, draws the literary circle far tighter and makes its references far more allusive:

Wee have all written for supply, without it we can do little or nothing and we shall not be abell to retch the place of our greatest hopes. I acquainted my Lord Genrall [Essex, then in command over Raleigh on the expedition] with your letter to mee, and your kind acceptance of your entertaynment. He was also wnderfull merry at your consayt of Richard II. I hope it shall never alter, and whereof I shalbe most gladd if it is the trew way to all our good, quiet, and advancement, and most of all for her sake whose affairs shall truly fynd better progression I will ever be yours.¹⁶

While the vagueness of the antecedents of "it" and "her" may be open to conjecture, the allusive applicability of the subject of Richard II is certainly implied. It is noteworthy that even this reference is dismissed by Chambers in much the same fashion, as he did with the "devoted, if critical officials," Knollys and Hunsdon, by simply stating

¹⁵Albright, pp. 697-698.

¹⁶Albright p. 698.

that in 1597 Cecil, Raleigh, and Essex were, for once, on friendly terms.¹⁷

Yet, here as with the Hoby letter, one finds the possibility of a reference to Shakespeare's play; and it is a reference from an aristocracy perhaps not so one-dimensionally loyal as some critics would have them, an aristocracy which may well have had an influence on the popularity of Shakespeare's play, and an aristocracy which may well have believed in the ability of the drama to move the populace on a political level.

Another piece of external evidence taken by Chambers to provide a date of 1595 concerns the publication of Daniel's

Civil Wars:

This was registered on 11 October 1594. Two editions appeared in 1595, and the second of these contains parallels to Richard II, which are not in the first. Obviously both might have preceded the play, but on the whole it seems more likely, especially on the analogy of Daniel's handling of his Cleopatra (C.f. Antony and Cleopatra), that he made these alterations after seeing it.¹⁸

This question of borrowing between Daniel and Shakespeare as a means of dating Richard II has been an area of controversy for some time. Charles Knight first pointed to the similarities in his Pictorial Edition of Shakespeare (1838-44), emphasizing

¹⁷Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 353.

¹⁸Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 351.

the debt to be Shakespeare's.¹⁹ In 1859, however, R.G. White's Works claimed Daniel the debtor by comparing the first and second 1595 editions - the view first promulgated in the twentieth century by E.K. Chambers.²⁰

Yet by 1939, John Dover Wilson had proven that there was no second edition of Daniel's poem in 1595, but merely a second printing differing from the first only in its title page. The differences noted by White, and reaffirmed by Chambers, did not appear until the 1609 edition.²¹ Since Wilson's discovery the majority of critics - including M.W. Black, Peter Ure, and Laurence Michel²² have noted the parallels, and viewed the debt as being on Shakespeare's side.

Perhaps the most definitive study of the problem is George M. Logan's article "Lucan-Daniel-Shakespeare: New Light on the Relationship Between The Civil Wars and Richard II" (1976), which traces the influence of Lucan's Pharsalia through both Daniel and Shakespeare, and concludes:

¹⁹Charles Knight, in George Logan, "Lucan-Daniel-Shakespeare: New Light on the Relation Between The Civil Wars and Richard II," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 121.

²⁰R.G. White, in George Logan, "Lucan-Daniel-Shakespeare: new Light on the Relation Between The Civil Wars and Richard II," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 121.

²¹George Logan, "Lucan-Daniel-Shakespeare: New Light on the Relation Between The Civil Wars and Richard II," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 121.

²²Logan, p. 121.

The only passages of Richard II that include Lucanic reminiscences come at places where Shakespeare is close to Daniel, and there is nothing in these passages to suggest that Shakespeare is drawing from Lucan rather than Daniel. The conclusion is that in these passages Daniel is following Lucan and Shakespeare is following Daniel.²³

While this may put the definitive stamp of a 'terminus a quo' date of late 1594 or early 1595 on Shakespeare's Richard II (the 'terminus ad quem' being 1597 with the publication of the first quarto), it also raises the question of Shakespeare's proximity to his sources.

When dealing with the question of topicality, one must needs look at the degree to which a work is dependent upon its sources. If the particular piece relies heavily on a specific source then certainly the originality of its social and political commentary may be refuted. Alternatively, if the piece draws from a variety of sources and presents the material in a hitherto unprecedented fashion - and if this subsequent compilation has an immediate topical applicability - then an originality of social and political consciousness is assertable.

For Shakespeare's Richard II, no less than seven principal sources have been variously suggested and accepted: (1) Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1586-7); (2) Samuel Daniel's The First Fowre Bookes of the Civile Warres (1595); (3) the anonymous play Woodstock

²³Logan, p. 121.

(?1595); (4) Lord Berners' translation of Froissart's Chronicles (1523-5); (5) Edward Hall's The union of the two noble and illustre families of lancastre and Yorke (first edition, 1548); (6) a version of the anonymous French manuscript La Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre (c. 1400); (7) and Jeap Creton's Histoire du Roy d' Angleterre Richard²⁴ (1400)

Two further source suggestions which have created some controversy in this century are Evelyn May Albright's assertion that Shakespeare was borrowing from the unpublished manuscript of Dr. John Hayward's Henry IIII (1599),²⁵ and John Dover Wilson's hypothesis of a non-extant source play - having a relationship much like that of The Troublesome Raigne to Shakespeare's King John.²⁶

Perhaps the only point of general agreement concerning sources among twentieth century critics [i.e. Chambers,²⁷ Craig,²⁸ and Muir²⁹] is that the basic structural model for the play is Christopher Marlowe's Edward II (?1591). Even here, however, one cannot emphasize enough the care

²⁴Ure, p. xxx.

²⁵Albright, p. 706.

²⁶Muir, p. xxii.

²⁷Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 351.

²⁸Craig, Complete Works, p. 644.

²⁹Muir, p. xxii.

with which one must proceed in analysing Shakespeare's dependence on his sources. It would sometimes seem quite possible, when one notes the degree to which a literary work is dependent upon its predecessors, to dismiss its own invention and then-current applicability entirely. Perhaps a clear example of this counsel of despair is Charles Lamb's opinion of the relationship between the two plays:

The reluctant pangs of abdicating Royalty in Edward furnished hints which Shakespeare scarcely improved in his Richard II; and the death-scene of Marlowe's King moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted.³⁰

While it is true that Shakespeare's is the debt in terms of dramatic treatment of monarchical deposition and downfall, one must bear in mind that he had already used an historical figure as the hero of a tragic plot in Richard III. By the time of Richard II, Marlowe's model is taken a step further, to the point where deposition becomes a more central issue to the drama than had hitherto been presented. As Hardin Craig stated in 1951:

The judgement of critics has been warped by their habit of interpreting Richard II in terms of that remorse of conscience for the dethronement and murder of a King which appears in the later plays of the series; namely in 1 and 2 Henry IV and Henry V; also in the horrid significance of the event as

³⁰Charles Lamb, in Glynne Wickham "Shakespeare's King Richard II and Marlowe's King Edward II," in Irving Ribner, ed., Christopher Marlowe's "Edward II": Text and Criticism (New York: the Odyssey Press, 1970), p. 199.

the first cause of the Civil Wars of the roses depicted in the Henry VI plays and Richard III. By looking at Richard II within its own borders, however, one sees that it is a tragedy, and not a history with which we have to do.³¹

Indeed, what is important in terms of topicality is the degree to which a work differs from its sources. In the case of Richard II, such differences are found in structure, theme, and overall manipulation of historical information. On the topic of departures from the primary structural source, the most comprehensive work is Glynne Wickham's "Shakespeare's King Richard II and Marlowe's King Edward II" (1969), which states that:

... a simple repetition of Edward's fate in terms of Richard's reign would have held little appeal either to the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors or to their patrons. Thus, if Richard II does represent a borrowing there is a good reason to suppose that the difference of treatment is as notable as the original borrowing.³²

He notes a number of interesting differences between the two plays which help to support such a statement. The antagonists find different ends, with Mortimer being executed and Bolingbroke being made King Henry IV. While admitting this to be historically true, Wickham argues that "it may

³¹Craig, Complete Works, p. 644.

³²Glynne Wickham, "Shakespeare's King Richard II and Marlowe's King Edward II," in Irving Ribner, ed., Christopher Marlowe's "Edward II": Text and Criticism (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1970), p. 199.

also indicate a difference of moral and artistic purpose since both dramatists felt free to alter the ordering of historical events if it suited them and their actors to do so.³³ Furthermore, a difference exists in the cause of conflict in each of the two plays. In Shakespeare's play Richard banishes Bolingbroke, and then confiscates his lands and plate. This creates an area of personal animosity between the king and his rival which helps to inspire the rebellion of the nobles. Contrastingly, it is Edward's revocation of Gaveston's banishment (from the previous reign) which first creates an arena of general discontent and brings about the need for an individual antagonist. Wickham concludes:

... The question of consequence to the dramatic development of Edward II is "who will fill this role?" and the answer is young Mortimer. This is never a question of consequence in Richard II, since it is obvious from the outset that Bolingbroke is the offended adversary: the question there is whether he can find sufficient support to claim compensation or revenge. The one point that both plays have in common is the personal contribution made by Edward and Richard respectively towards answering these questions in a manner that invites their own destruction.³⁴

Thus, one must avoid the misconception that parallels on a structural level imply a similarity of emphasis. Such is true too of parallels on an historical level. This is not, of course, meant to deny the importance of such historical

³³Wickham, "Shakespeare's King Richard II," p. 200.

³⁴Wickham, "Shakespeare's King Richard II," p. 200.

parallels, but attempts to put them into perspective; thereby avoiding such views as those expressed by Dr. Johnson in 1765:

... the play is extracted from the chronicle of Holinshed, in which many passages may be found which Shakespeare has, with very little alteration transplanted into his scenes; particularly a speech by the Bishop of Carlisle in defence of King Richard's unalienable right and immunity from human jurisdiction.³⁵

It is important that one realize the extremity of such a view, particularly when dealing with the question of topicality, since it has persisted into the twentieth century, bringing into question the originality of Shakespeare's work. As recently as 1969, Stanley Wells introduced the play in the following fashion:

... the play raises many general issues, both political and personal. But Shakespeare does not specifically relate them to the situation at the time he was writing. Nor does he twist the facts so as to force his audience into an awareness of relationships with contemporary politics. This play is closer to history as Shakespeare knew it than most of his plays about English history.³⁶

Certainly it must be admitted that when dealing with a subject grounded in history, an author must rely at least to a degree on historical sources. And in Richard II Shakespeare relies more heavily on Holinshed's Chronicles

³⁵Dr. Johnson, in Wilson, p. xxxviii.

³⁶Wells, p. 14.

- specifically the second edition of 1587, since II, iv, 8 uses a passage not in that of 1577³⁷ - than any other historical source. However, one must note that Shakespeare is not simply dramatizing Holinshed, for he has omitted and added to the story in order to create a cohesive stage drama.

Specifically, Richard II omits Holinshed's long account of both Richard's Irish campaign and Northumberland's leading of him into the ambush between Conway and Flint, as well as the full texts of various documents - such as the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon on the deposition. Further, he alters the chronological sequence of events (notable in IV, i), and is rather liberal with time - i.e. between events - and age - such as the unhistorical youthfulness of Hotspur.³⁸

Peter Ure, in his introduction to the Arden edition (1961), notes some seven additions not found in the Chronicles, including the character and behavior of John of Gaunt; the Duchess of Gloucester's meeting with Gaunt in I, ii; nearly all of Isabel's part: her grief, her parting with Richard, and her womanly behavior (in Holinshed as in history, she was a child of eleven); the character and behavior of the Duchess of York in Act V; the garden scene (III, iv); much of the character and behavior of Richard - especially in

³⁷Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 356.

³⁸Ure, p. xxxii.

the last two acts; and the part played in the tragedy by Northumberland.³⁹ It should here be noted that while one may attribute more than half of these points to various possible sources, the areas of deviation concerning the Duchess of York, Northumberland, and the garden scene are attributable only to Shakespeare; and it is these points, too, that will be seen to provide important parts in the political thrust of Richard II.

Shakespeare's unhistorical account of Gaunt (Holinshed depicts him as a turbulent and self-seeking magnate) has been attributed by John Dover Wilson to Berners' translation of Froissart's Chronicle.⁴⁰ It is only this source which provides information about Gaunt's sickness, his last days of life, and the joy Richard shows at his death. Further, it is Froissart who first presented Gaunt as not attempting to avenge Gloucester's death, even with the knowledge of Richard's many wrongs:⁴¹

The duke of Lancast~~re~~ was sore dyspleased in his mynde to se the kyng~~e~~ his nephewe mysse use hymselfe in dyvers thynges as he dyd. He consydr~~e~~d the tyme to come lyke a sage prince, and somtyme sayd to suche as he trusted best: Our nepheue the kyng~~e~~ of Englande wyll shame all or he cease: he beleveth to lyghtly yvell counsaile who shall distroy hym; and symply, if he lyve longe, he wyll lese his realme, and that hath been gotten with moche coste and travayle

³⁹Ure, pp. xxxii, xxxiii.

⁴⁰Ure, p. xxxiv.

⁴¹Ure, p. xxxiv.

by our predecessours and by us; he suffreth to engendre
in this realme bytwene the noble men hate and dyscorde,
by whom he shulde be served and honoured, and this
lande kept and doubted ...⁴²

Yet, Shakespeare need not have consulted Froissart to find a prince sick before dying, and Richard's reaction to his death is certainly implicit in his action of seizing Bolingbroke's lands and title - an action well-documented in other sources. Further, it is Shakespeare who places emphasis on Gaunt's accusation of Richard's "farming" the realm - an accusation not found in Froissart. Such points as these, as well as the absence of any verbal echoes⁴³ or any other similarities in the two accounts - Froissart's overall plot bearing little resemblance to Shakespeare's - must cause one to regard any influence as questionable.

The influences of the anonymous Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart Deux and Jean Creton's Histoire du Roy d'Angleterre Richard are open to similar scepticism. While both were used by such contemporary literary figures as Stowe, Holinshed, and Hall, these highly sympathetic accounts of Richard's fall were available to Shakespeare only in manuscript.⁴⁴ Paul Reyher and John Dover Wilson have asserted their value as sources for Richard II on the

⁴²Ure, pp. xxxiv, xxxv.

⁴³Ure, p. xxxv.

⁴⁴Ure, p. xlx.

basis of verbal echoes, the transmission of historical details otherwise unavailable, and supposed general resemblances in theme - particularly the treatment of Richard (in the last two acts) in a more sympathetic light than Holinshed.⁴⁵

One must remain careful in identifying them as sources, for even Reyher and Wilson only go so far as to see them as providing suggestions for Shakespeare's play. That is to say, they represent the possible "germ" of an idea - such as for a far more sympathetic ending for Richard (a point, it will be noted below, which is more readily understood in terms of dramatic necessity). Further, such assertions are always arguable on the grounds of Shakespeare's own invention; and the use of these particular French sources in such a fashion requires, as Peter Ure stated, that Shakespeare:

... searched well below the surface of Holinshed for primary sources which took the form of privately-owned manuscripts in fifteenth century French. We may not refuse to believe this ... provided the links between the manuscripts and the play are demonstrably firm. In this case, at least, a mere chain of ingenious probabilities will not serve, although one verbal echo which cannot be ascribed to coincidence or the intervention of another source, or the internal logic of the drama, or one historical fact of the same kind, will be quite sufficient. I do not think this has been forthcoming so far.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ure, p. xli.

⁴⁶Ure, p. xli.

Another historical source, Edward Hall's The union of the noble and illustre famelies of Lancaster and Yorke, has been noted on even less specific grounds. E.M.W. Tillyard and John Dover Wilson have claimed that:

The most striking parallel between Hall and [Richard II] ... is the fact that both begin at the same point [the appeals of Mowbray and Bolingbroke] and that in a sense Hall furnished the frame and stretched the canvas for the whole Shakespearian cycle, Richard II to Richard III.⁴⁷

Despite the possibility that Hall may provide a "frame" for the entire tetralogy, there is very little evidence connecting Richard II and Hall on the basis of information found in The Union and not in Holinshed.⁴⁸ Indeed, Shakespeare's use of source material of an historical nature can hardly be seen as mere recapitulation - he does not borrow specifically from one historical source for the entirety of his work, nor does he leave information that he does borrow untouched by his creative will.

This, of course, is true in varying degrees for all authors dealing with an historical source; particularly when that author is attempting to create a less historical, more dramatic poem or play. Having already noted that the debt between The Civil Wars and Richard II lies on Shakespeare's side, the points upon which they coincide and differ -

⁴⁷Ure, p. xlix.

⁴⁸Ure, p. xlix.

particularly in terms of information not found in the historical sources - become an essential area of inquiry;

In perhaps the most detailed study of this question, Laurence Michel, in his introduction to the 1958 edition of The Civil Wars calls it:

... the most illuminating background reading yet found for full appreciation of Richard II, and a companion piece not unworthy to stand beside it in its own right.⁴⁹

He identifies some five specific points upon which the two works agree, and yet differ from their chronicle sources: the presentation of Isabel as a mature woman, and not as her historical eleven year old self; Bolingbroke's and Richard's entrance into London tandem style - the former in triumph and the latter in defeat; Richard's actual handing of the crown to Bolingbroke; the hints of King Henry IV, upon which Sir Piers of Exton murders Richard; and Richard's last poetic speech - just before a servant rushes in to warn him of the arrival of Exton and the assassins.⁵⁰

Certainly, these specific similarities must be admitted. Thematically, however, Richard's dethronement is treated quite differently in The Civil Wars and Richard II. Michel's introduction relies on Tillyard's maxim concerning Shakespeare's

⁴⁹Laurence Michel, ed., The Civil Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 21.

⁵⁰Michel, pp. 11-13.

adherence to Tudor doctrine, and subsequently he links the two works in the following thematic fashion:

Both poets ... begin at the same point in the reign of Richard II, and in political philosophy they are identical, showing the evils of civil dissension and the curse of rebellion.⁵¹

As a whole, this would definitely seem to be the attitude with which Daniel presents the events of Richard's downfall in his Civil Wars:

And, Lancaster, indeed I would thy cause
Had had as lawfull and as sure a ground,
As had thy vertues, and thy noble hart,
Ordaind, and borne for an imperial part.

116.

Then had not that confus'd succeeding Age
Our fieldes ingrayn'd with bloud, our rivers dy'd
With purple - streaming wounds of our owne rage,
Nor seene our Princes slaughtered, Peeres destroyed,
Then hadst not thou, deare Countrie, com'n to wage
Warre with thy selfe, nor those afflictions try'd
Of all consuming discorde here so long;
Too mightie now, against thy selfe too strong,

(I, 115-116)

Yet it will be argued below that, in the context of Richard II, Shakespeare avoids such sermonizing, presenting the necessity of Bolingbroke's Machiavellian usurpation in juxtaposition with the inertia of Richard's reign:

Gaunt. Methinks I am a prophet new inspir'd,
And thus expiring do foretell of him:
His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last.
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;

⁵¹Michel, p. 18.

Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short;
 He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;
 With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder;
 Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
 Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.

(II, i, 31-39)

This question of reliance on sources becomes even more pertinent when one is dealing with the borrowing of material from other dramatic works. If Shakespeare is relying heavily on a recently printed or performed play one could certainly assert that his Richard II contains little original topical material. In his William Shakespeare (1930), E.K. Chambers noted:

It is quite possible that he had an older source-play before him, and conceivably he preserved rather more of a predecessor's phrasing than he did in the almost contemporary King John. If so, it probably dealt, perhaps in a first part, with the murder of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, a knowledge of which seems assumed in the play as it stands.⁵²

Given that Jack Straw (?1591) deals with the revolt of 1381, and not Gloucester's death or Richard's deposition, as well as its presentation of Richard as a noble, if misguided King, generously providing pardons for all but the leaders of rebellion, one can safely dismiss it as a primary source for Shakespeare's Richard II. The case for the anonymous Thomas of Woodstock (?1595) however, is neither as direct nor as simple.

⁵²Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 352.

In his 1946 introduction to Woodstock: a Moral History, A.P. Rossiter stated:

... The writer who uses the 'general idea' or a 'recurrent theme' in an earlier play tends unwittingly to collect his 'echoes' into the place or places where an idea or theme is treated. In Richard II we find little or nothing of Woodstock echoed after the beginning of Act III: Shakespeare has used his recollection and (with the King going out of all compass for the smaller play's conception) goes his way.⁵³

But determining on whose side lies the debt is far more complicated than Rossiter would have it. As Peter Ure noted:

... but we do not know whether or not the writing of Woodstock preceded that of Richard II. Since it was first printed by Halliwell from MS Egerton 1844 in 1870, Woodstock has had three different editors. The manuscript "bears marks of having been in long and constant use as a prompt copy, while the marginal entries in different hands suggest that it underwent several revivals." As to the date of composition and first performance, the evidence of the manuscript itself points in conflicting directions.⁵⁴

Certainly there are quite a number of verbal echoes in the first two Acts of Richard II which cannot be ignored; and Shakespeare's unhistorical conception of a loyal John of Gaunt is quite similar to Woodstock's unhistorical Glouster. Further, when Gloucester is referred to in Richard II, it is in the same unhistorical "plain Thomas" fashion as presented

⁵³A.P. Rossiter, ed., Woodstock: A Moral History (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 50.

⁵⁴Ure, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

only in the anonymous work. However, to conclude that Shakespeare's Gaunt is the anonymous playwright's Gloucester remade is merely a conjectural possibility; particularly since Shakespeare's character may have been similarly germinated by Froissart's Gaunt.⁵⁵

Further, Rossiter's insistence that Richard II is dependent upon Woodstock for knowledge concerning the murder of Gloucester, the financial farming of the realm, and the actions of the favourites is refutable within the context of Shakespeare's play. While Gaunt's reference to "My brother Gloucester, plain, well-meaning soul" (II, i, 128) is undoubtedly on echo of Woodstock, Rossiter overemphasized such echoes when he stated:

... the whole matter of the death of Gloucester, with the king's complicity and Mowbray's part, must have equally been involved in difficulty - from which readers of Shakespeare depend on editorial notes from History books to relieve them.⁵⁶

This is to ignore the implications of the very first reference to the murder by Bolingbroke. Its presentation as the third accusation is a deliberate move to heighten its dramatic effect; giving it the emphasis of a trump card:

That Mowbray hath receiv'd eight thousand nobles
In name of lendings for your Highness' soldiers,
The which he hath detain'd for lewd employments,

⁵⁵Ure, p. x1.

⁵⁶Rossiter, p. 47.

Like a false traitor, and injurious villain;
 Besides I say, and will in battle prove,
 Or here, or elsewhere to the furthest verge
 That ever was survey'd by English eye,
 That all the treasons for these eighteen years
 Complotted and contrived in this land
 Fetch from false Mowbray their first head and spring;
 Further I say, and further will maintain
 Upon his bad life to make all this good,
 That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death,
 Suggest his soon-believing adversaries,
 And consequently, like a traitor coward,
 Slue'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood,
 Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries
 Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
 To me for justice and rough chastisement;
 And, by the glorious worth of my descent,
 This arm shall do it, or this life be spent.
 (I, i, 88-108)

Against the first two accusations Mowbray readily
 defends himself, but to the third - the murder of Gloucester
 - he provides a curious response:

... For Gloucester's death,
 I slew him not, but to my own disgrace
 Neglected my sworn duty in that case.
 (I, i, 132-134)

John Dover Wilson has called this an "embarrassed and ambiguous
 speech....," adding that the "issue ... is left quite obscure."⁵⁷
 Upon closer examination of Shakespeare's text, however,
 one finds a plausible explanation.

The person to whom Mowbray immediately appeals after
 this speech, and to whom his duty is permanently sworn,
 is Richard. In the eyes of the audience, the question of

⁵⁷Rossiter, p. 48.

who actually killed Gloucester is left unanswered after the first scene, yet the appeal to the king becomes significant in the scene immediately following where Gaunt refuses to avenge his brother's death:

God's is the quarrel - for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift,
An angry arm against His minister.
(I, ii, 37-41)

It is in the very next scene that Richard rather dramatically removes the entire problem by banishing both Bolingbroke and Mowbray - the latter for a notably longer period of time. Two scenes later, York almost directly accuses Richard of the murder in his comparison between him and the late King Edward:

But when he frown'd it was against the French,
And not against his friends; his noble hand
Did win what he did spend, and spent not that
What his triumphant father's hand had won,
His hands were guilty of no kindred blood,
But bloody with the enemies of his kin.
O Richard! York is too far gone with grief,
Or else he never would compare between -
(II, i, 178-185)

The Bishop of Carlisle's speech in Act IV on the noble death of Mowbray serves, in a sense, as an exoneration for him - thus leaving Richard alone to bear the blame:

Many a time hath banish'd Norfolk fought
For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field,
Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross
Against black Pagans, Turks, and Saracens;

And, toil'd with works of war, retir'd himself
 To Italy; and there at Venice gave.
 His body to that pleasant country's earth,
 And his pure soul unto his captain Christ
 Under whose colours he had fought so long.
 (IV, 1, 91-100)

It is noteworthy, too, that immediately following this speech York informs us that Richard will resign the crown to Bolingbroke.

In an article entitled "Richard II and the Woodstock Murder" (1971), A.L. French stated that:

Far from being what Dover Wilson called it, a 'minor strand in the texture of the piece, it is actually the mainspring of the dramatic action in the first third of the play (that is, up to the end of II, i) - dominating the exposition; in one way or another it is behind everything that goes on - not only the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray (which leads to the banishment), but also Richard's seizure of Gaunt's estates, Bolingbroke's return, and Richard's consequent downfall. To ignore the Woodstock murder is, therefore, to make nonsense of the play.⁵⁸

Indeed, throughout the play, the murder of Gloucester, is an ever-present instigating force for Bolingbroke's action; and the blame for the murder ultimately rests on the shoulders of Richard. This emphasis on the king's own instigation of his downfall provides the response to Rössiter's assertion of the play's dependence on Woodstock for references to the farming of the realm, and the role played by the favourites: ... Even more is this so with the blank charters and the farming of the realm. Unless we know Woodstock,

⁵⁸A.L. French, "Richard II and the Woodstock Murder," Shakespeare Quarterly, 22 (1971), 337.

or are edified from without in some other way, the references to the former abuses are barely graspable. To take but one example, the line "Thy state of law is bondslave to the law" is hopelessly obscure unless we remember how Tresilian, the lawyer, has provided the document by which Richard becomes "Landlord of England . . . not king." ... In a similar way, though Greene is killed in Woodstock but alive in Richard II, the latter play gives the favourites so little introduction or development as to make it a natural supposition that Shakespeare took them "as read."⁵⁹

This is to ignore that when one meets the favourites at the end of the first act of Richard II, and Greene advises that something must be done about the rebels in Ireland, Richard replies:

We will ourself in person to this war;
And for our coffers, with too great a court
And liberall largess, are grown somewhat light,
We are inforc'd to farm our royal realm,
The revenue whereof shall furnish us
For our affairs in hand. If that come short,
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters,
Whereto, when they shall know what men are rich,
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold,
And send them after to supply our wants;
For we will make for Ireland presently.

(I, iv, 42-52)

Less than ten lines later, when the favourite Bushy brings news of York's impending death, Richard continues:

Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!
The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish Wars.

⁵⁹Rossiter, p. 45.

Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him,
 Pray God we may make haste and come too late!
 (I, iv, 59-64)

In these two early sections of the play one finds ample reference by Richard to his financial misdealings; and further, they help to point to a significantly different treatment of the king's downfall. Here the favourites are portrayed as frivolous yes-men, agreeing to and encouraging his indulgences. With no active Tresilian to blame, Richard becomes the cause of his own political destruction; and the result is that in Shakespeare's play one has a balanced juxtaposition of Richard and Bolingbroke both as character types and as embodiments of political philosophies.

This differs markedly from the active role played by the favourites in Woodstock. The play opens with an attempt to poison the nobles in opposition to the King's favourites - and notably that opposition exonerates the king from any wrongdoing:

'Tis certainly made known, my reverend lords,
 To your loved brother, and good Protector
 That not King Richard but his flatterers
 Sir Henry Greene, joined with Sir Edward Bagot
 And that sly machiavel Tresilian,
 (Whom now the king elects for Lord Chief Justice)
 Had all great hands in this conspiracy.
 (I, i, 59-66)

Indeed, the purpose of the actions of Woodstock and the other nobles is to "Destroy those flatterers ... and tell King Richard / He does abase himself to countenance

them." (I, i, 170-171). It is these flatterers who are seen as 'ruinating' the kingdom as they actively farm the realm with Tresilian's blank charters. With Richard in a subsequently less evil role he is able to come to a degree of self-realization before his crown is in danger; this is evident in Act IV, when he attempts to prevent the murder of Gloucester:

Send post to Calais and bid Lapoole forbear
 On pain of Life, to act our sad decree.
 For heavn's love, go, prevent the tragedy.
 Wee have too much provoked the powers divine
 And here repent thy wrongs, good uncle Woodstock:
 The thought whereof confounds my memory.
 If men might die when they would point the time,
 The time is now King Richard would be gone;
 For as a fearful thunder - clap doth strike
 The soundest body of the tallest oak,
 Yet harmless leaves the outward bark untouched,
 So is King Richard struck. Come, come lets go:
 My wounds are inward. Inward burns my woe.
 (IV, iii, 170-182)

Such a degree of self-evaluation and self-knowledge does not - and arguably, with Richard's more active role in the decay of the kingdom, could not - occur in Richard II until the King's very crown is removed. Certainly it cannot be denied that Shakespeare makes far less use of the favourites than does the anonymous playwright of Woodstock, but within the context of Richard II it would seem to be readily understandable, and quite necessary for its dramatic success. As Paul Gaudet, in his article "The Parasitical Counselors in Shakespeare's Richard II" (1982), noted:

Shakespeare has deliberately modified the traditional characterization of the favourites to reinforce the play's ambivalent mode of experience, with its emphasis on the intricacies, deceptions and follies of human politics. The oblique rendering of Bushy, Bagot, and Green in Richard II should not be dismissed as carelessness, nor as a reliance on audience expectations; it is rather an indication of Shakespeare's evolving artistic control in the adaptation of historical materials for the stage. It shows, in particular, his growth in the handling of character with subtlety and allusiveness and his ability to orchestrate all the elements of a play to sustain a central dramatic impression.⁶⁰

Thus, as with his other dramatic and historical sources, Shakespeare is not dependent but independent in his use of thematic and factual suggestion. It is true that he may well have found the "germs" for certain characters, passages, or treatments in a variety of sources, but he is not specifically relying on any single extant work for the treatment of his subject.

Such a conclusion is not so easily reached when one looks at the possibility of Shakespeare borrowing heavily from a non-extant source. E.K. Chambers chose to lend some credence to such a source being mentioned in Simon Forman's report of the King's men having a Richard II other than Shakespeare's in 1611:

⁶⁰Paul Gaudet, "The Parasitical Counselors in Shakespeare's Richard II," Shakespeare Quarterly, 33 (1982), 154.

... Perhaps it is even more likely than Thomas of Woodstock to represent the first part of a source play used by Shakespeare.⁶¹

Yet any dependence would seem to be denied by the description of the play as covering Straw's riot, the death of Gloucester, and a plot by John of Gaunt to make his son King.⁶² Given the lack of any further references to the play, and the uncertainty of its covering Richard's deposition, one may move on to other source suggestions.

Even more precarious is John Dover Wilson's assertion of Richard II's dependence on a non-existent play by the anonymous playwright of The Troublesome Raigne. The primary arguments concern the presence of details in Shakespeare's play which pre-suppose knowledge on the part of the audience; the presence of "fossil" rhymes in some of the blank verse - perhaps indicating that speeches were originally in rhymed form; the pooriness of certain scenes (i.e. V, iii) - which Shakespeare, it is supposed, borrowed from the source play; and the use in Richard II of information only in the previously mentioned French chronicles.⁶³

The fourth point has already been treated. The third point is based on the invalid assumption that a "great" playwright always writes "greatly." The second point ignores

⁶¹Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 351. -

⁶²Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 352.

⁶³Muir, pp. xxiii, xxiv.

the possibility that Shakespeare may be rewriting his own rhymed verse. One is left with the first assertion - that features in Shakespeare's play are obscure because they are copied from another work and are not explained as they were in that text.

This is primarily based on the single reference in the play to "the prevention of poor Bolingbrook / about his marriage" (II, i, 67-68) and Bolingbroke's charge against Bushy and Greene that:

You have in manner, with your sinful hours,
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
Broke the possession of a royal bed,
And stain'd the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks
With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs;
(III, i. 11-15)

Of the first point, Wilson claimed that:

... We have here a loose thread, the presence of which indicates that more was made of the matter in the original play - it was a strong point in favour of Bolingbroke, - and that Shakespeare, suppressing the motive in revision so as to lengthen the scales in Richard's favour, overlooked the casual mention of it in York's speech.⁶⁴

This ignores the rather lengthy reference to the prevention of Bolingbroke's marriage found in Holinshed:

This was a pestilent kind of proceeding against that nobleman then being in a forren countrie, hauing beene so honorable receiued as he was at his entrance into France, and vpon view and good liking of his

⁶⁴Wilson, p. lxvi.

behavior there, so forward in marriage with a ladie of noble linage. So sharpe, so severe, & so heinous an accusation, brought to a strange king from a naturall prince, against his subiect after punishment inflicted (for he was banished) was inough to have made the French king his fatall fo, & vpon suspition of assaieng the like trecherie against him, to haue throwne him out of the limits of his land.⁶⁵

Rather than some otherwise unknown play, Holinshed therefore seems a more plausible and sufficient source for this underdeveloped detail.

The question of "breaking the possession of the royal bed" is certainly more difficult to explain. Given the unhistorical presentation of an adult Isabel, and the seeming inexplicability of the remark in the context of Shakespeare's play, the possibility that Shakespeare is either borrowing from another source or failing to explain his own invention certainly exists. However, determining that it comes from a non-extant source play would seem to be impossible; as Peter Ure stated:

... but it is hard to conceive any "old play" containing any expansion of this element which yet retained sketches for the "Isabel" and "Richard" of Shakespeare, and harder still to see why "Shakspeare's unknown predecessor, soaked in the history of England" (Wilson, p. lxxx) should so wilfully depart from history.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Holinshed, p. 848.

⁶⁶Ure, p. 91.

He continues on to list five other possible explanations for the line (including echoes of Edward II and Woodstock⁶⁷), and concludes:

... the favourites are merely "flatterers," those who, according to 16th century moralia, weaken a monarch's power to rule by encouraging his vices. Handbooks for princes such as those by Machiavelli, Erasmus, or Castiglione, castigate flattery, which keeps the prince ignorant of the world and himself.⁶⁸

With the line possibly being inspired by a variety of sources, and serving only to heighten the flaws of the favourites, rather than changing the dramatic action, one can safely abandon any suggestion of its being evidence for the existence of a non-extant source play by the anonymous author of The Troublesome Raigne.

In terms of both topicality and censorability, the most interesting of all alleged non-extant sources is the manuscript of John Hayward's Henry VIII (1597). In her previously mentioned article "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy" (1927), Evelyn May Albright noted that despite the fact that Hayward's publication date was some two years after the first quarto of Richard II, his trial testimony reports that he had contemplated treating the subject a dozen years before. This enables Albright to suggest that Hayward had actually written the work some

⁶⁷Ure, p. 91.

⁶⁸Ure, p. 91.

years prior to publication and allowed Shakespeare to use it for historical details. She states:

At any rate, the resemblances are close enough to require some explanation. And they occur chiefly in connection with what the Queen's lawyers said were attempts to picture Elizabeth's times under the guise of Richard's: the accounts of base favourites, unjust taxation, costly and mistaken Irish policies, the unhistorical conception of Henry IV as a "popular" hero (a conception not in the Henry plays that followed), and making the deposition seem inevitable ... I think it likely that Shakespeare used both Holinshed and Hayward as sources, but he finds in Hayward points not in Holinshed.⁶⁹

E.K. Chambers quite properly dismisses the theory of Hayward's unpublished manuscript as "perverse" in light of the relative dates of publication of the works in question, and Hayward's subsequent testimony that he had acquainted no one with his plans, having only begun the work a year previously. Yet Chambers would seem to have been underestimating the importance of the parallels between the two works when he simply stated:

...There are parallels; but they may best be explained through use by the historian of the play.⁷⁰

Similarly, the most exacting and precise attack on Albright's article, Ray Heffner's "Shakespeare, Hayward and Essex" (1930), completely denies any possible political analogy

⁶⁹Albright, p. 706.

⁷⁰Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 356..

on the part of Shakespeare's play, or the story of Richard II:

Certain it is that Hayward's book was called in question not because it dealt with any acceptably "dangerous subject" nor because Elizabeth recognized herself as Richard II, but because it came out at a critical time and was dedicated to Essex in such a way that he considered it damaging to his chances with the Queen. There is not a single point in the evidence to show that Elizabeth recognized any allusion to herself, much less that she was nicknamed "Richard II."⁷¹

While one would have to agree with Heffner's attack on Albright's dating of the works, as well as acknowledge the fact that with Essex's overt activity Hayward's dedication became even more blatantly topical, in light of the information hitherto presented one would have to disagree with Heffner's emphasis on Elizabeth's ignorance of any analogy between herself and Richard II.

An interesting paradox occurs when one juxtaposes these views with those of Ernest P. Kuhl who, in his article "Shakespeare and Hayward" (1928) emphasized the possibility that Hayward both borrowed from Richard II, and protected Shakespeare in his trial testimony:

As for the words spoken by King Richard II, that princes must not rule without limitation, and C., affirms that to be a true opinion if rightly understood; did not intend it to be taken generally, but that princes were to be limited by the law Divine and

⁷¹Heffner, p. 763.

the law of nature only; had this from a book written three years since, but cannot remember the author.⁷²

Noting that in 1598 two quartos of Shakespeare's Richard II were printed, and that those unhistorical points of Hayward's work which brought him into disrepute were also found in them, Kuhl questions why the author of Henry VIII did not mention Shakespeare when he defended himself for his unhistorically popular conception of Bolingbroke by stating that he "found in Hall and others that he was of popular behavior, but for the particulars he took the best writers."⁷³

It does seem quite curious that Hayward, an obviously well-read classicist in his book and in his testimony, could not recall a major three year-old source, or was unable to name the best writers to whom he referred. Further, while one may or may not agree that Hayward was possibly protecting Shakespeare, one must at least acknowledge the suggestiveness of the question Kuhl raises as to why Shakespeare was not also "under fire" from the authorities.⁷⁴

It therefore becomes increasingly important to this inquiry into the political significance of Richard II to look at those historical events and personalities which

⁷²Ernest P. Kuhl, "Shakespeare and Hayward," Studies in Philology, 25 (1928), 313.

⁷³Kuhl, p. 314.

⁷⁴Kuhl, p. 314.

may have been considered analogous to events and personalities of the period of composition and performance; as well as those points which may prove linked with Hayward's Henry VIII and the rebellion of the Earl of Essex.

CHAPTER IV

THE TOPICALITY OF RICHARD II

Perhaps the most detailed work on the subject of topical reference inherent in Richard II is the Evelyn May Albright article "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy" (1927) so often mentioned above. An example of the contemporary references she finds in the play comes in II, i where York pictures King Richard as being too afflicted by the:

Report of fashions in proud Italy,
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
Limps after in base imitation.
(II, i, 21-23)

By stressing the improbability of Shakespeare's not knowing that the foreign model of Richard's time was France and not the Renaissance Italian model of Elizabethan England,¹ Albright begins the process of illuminating Richard II as a play highly reflective of the social and political fabric of the 1590's. This is but the starting point, however, for the significance of the allusions pointed to goes far beyond a commentary on social mimicry to a lucid critique

¹Albright, p. 692.

of the political anxieties facing Elizabethans in the final decade of the sixteenth century.

In this very same act, Albright focuses on three consecutive speeches by Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby which refer to the reign of favourites, exaction of benevolences, and unjust taxation:

North. Now afore God 'tis shame such wrongs are borne
In him, a royal prince, and many mo
Of noble blood in this declining land;
The king is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers; and what they will inform,
Merely in hate, 'gainst any of us all,
That will the king severely prosecute
'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs.

Ross. The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes,
And quite lost their hearts. The nobles hath he fin'd,
For ancient quarrels and quite lost their hearts.

Will. And daily new exactions are devis'd
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.
But what a God's name doth become of this?
(II, i, 238-251)

To these one may add the following five short speeches by the same figures, which Albright neglects:

North. Wars hath not wasted it, for warr'd he hath not,
But basely yielded upon compromise
That which his ancestors achiev'd with blows;
More hath he spent in peace than they in wars.

Ross. The Earl of Wiltshire hath the realm in farm.

Will. The King's grown bankrout like a broken man.

North. Reproach and dissolution hangeth over him.

Ross. He hath no money for these Irish wars.
His burthenous taxes notwithstanding
But by the robbing of the banish'd Duke
(II, i, 252-261)

Such criticisms as these not only bore a direct applicability to the politics of 1595, but would grow in relevance and sensitivity as the century drew to a close - much as in the case of Jonson's Sejanus² (1603). Indeed, throughout her reign, Elizabeth remained scandalously susceptible to the praises and influence of such flattering young men, as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex:

To be noticed and talked to was very heaven. Some invested a fortune with tailors to be turned out as court dandies that they might perchance catch her Majesty's eye as a means of setting a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder of preferment; others less ambitious for themselves wanted no more than to have the twinkling of one beam of the splendiferous planet.³

That the exaction of benevolences - which had dated from 1475 and was employed in Elizabeth's time - was a sore point for the political administration is highlighted by its being one of the chief pieces of evidence used against Hayward to prove that he meant Elizabeth's day when he spoke of Richard in his Henry VIII.⁴

In fact, the years 1592 and 1593 were noted for oppressive taxation; and Francis Bacon lost face in the

²Petterson, p. 50.

³Neville Williams, The Life and Times of Elizabeth I (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972), p. 137.

⁴Albright, p. 692.

latter years of the decade for chastising parliament about the large number of subsidies granted in so short a period.⁵ By the turn of the century the impoverishment of the royal treasury would reach unheard of depths; as B. R. Outhwaite stated:

The crown was deep in debt. Elizabeth owed the Corporation [of London] 80,000 pounds, and had failed to pay the interest charges on the last loan, and a further 120,000 pounds was outstanding in privy seal loans. Crown lands were being sold on an unprecedented scale and the proceeds were being used, not to repay these debts, but to keep the crown's head above the continuously high level of expenditure. Moreover the Queen was old, there were doubts about the succession, and there was never any guarantee that her successor would honor her debts. These factors combined to produce a situation in which Elizabeth's credit would reach its nadir.⁶

Inexorably linked with the question of finance were the English exploits in Ireland. As Neville Williams has written in The Life and Times of Elizabeth I (1972):

Ireland had remained an insoluble problem for Elizabeth, as for later sovereigns, and campaigns against a series of rebels cost her vast sums, while the fighting proved a graveyard for military reputations.

⁵Albright, p. 692.

⁶B.R. Outhwaite, in H.R. Coursen, The Leasing Out of England: Shakespeare's Second Henriad (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), p. 28.

⁷Williams, p. 101.

And the "doubt about the succesion" mentioned by Outhwaite went beyond honoring Elizabeth's debts to a very real anxiety over who would in fact replace her. The queen's godson, Sir John Harrington - who served with Essex in Ireland and was commander of horse to Southampton - described in his Tract on the Succession (1602) what he called a "secret of state":

The Queene's Majestie that now is being soone after hir entrance to hir reigne troubled with some rumors and perhaps causelesse feares suggested to hir concerning quarrels made to hir title, and namely because the Queen of Scots being married into France quartered the Armes of England, as Buchanan testifieth in the place before alledged. A strong impression remained in her mynde, that if she should allow and permitt men to examine, discusse, and publishe whose title was the best title after hers, some would be ready to affirme that title to be good afore hers. Now, as our countriman, Mr. Daniel, writes -

That still the greatest wrongs that ever were Have then been wrought when Kings were put in feare.

For these scruples and the Bull of Pius Quintus (in this Pius Impius) first she utterly suppress the talke of an heire apparent, saising she would not have hir wynding sheet sett up afore hir face.⁸

Historically one finds that Elizabeth's fears were not ungrounded. Sir Thomas Wilson, a contemporary lawyer, wrote in 1600 that no fewer than twelve different "competitors ... gape for the death of that good old princess, the now Queen."⁹ And further, that such knowledge was widespread,

⁸Albright, p. 694.

⁹Wilson, p. xxiv.

and caused a good deal of anxiety, is witnessed by the fact that as late as 1611, the authorized version of the Bible would contain in its address of the translation to His Majesty the following passage - a passage which, as John Dover Wilson noted, is not all flattery:¹⁰

For whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well unto our Sion, that vpon the setting of that bright "Occidentall Starre" Queen Elizabeth or most happy memory, some thicke and palpable cloudes of darkenesse would so haue ouershadowed this land, that men should haue bene in doubt which way they were to walke, and that it should hardly be knowne, who was to direct the vnttled State: the appearance of your Maiestie, as of the "Sunne" in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists, and gaue unto all that were well affected, exceeding cause of comfort; especially when we beheld the government established in your Highnesse, and your hopefull Seed, by an vndoubted Title, this also accompanied with Peace and tranquillitie, at home and abroad.¹¹

In II, 1 of Shakespeare's Richard II, York directly attacks the King for his attitude toward the principle of the right to the throne of England by 'fair sequence and succession':

Take Herford's rights away, and take from time
His charters, and his customary rights;
Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day:
Be not thyself. For how art thou a King
But by fair sequence and succession?
Now afore God - god forbid I say true! -
If you do wrongfully seize Herford's rights,
Call in the letters patents that he hath

¹⁰Wilson, p. xxviii.

¹¹Wilson, p. xxviii.

By his attorneys-general to sue,
 His livery, and deny his off'red homage,
 You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
 You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,
 And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
 Which honour and allegiance cannot think.

(II, i, 195-208)

This passage would bear an immediate applicability in 1595 to the Earl of Essex, for in that year he was in some disgrace over a book written by the pseudonymous R. Doleman, entitled A Conference About Succession To the Crown of England. Dedicated to Essex, and asserting the claims of the Infanta of Spain as a descendent of John of Gaunt, the book was - according to Essex's biographer, W.B. Devereux - written to bring him into disrepute:

... more especially as his own claim as a descendent of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, sixth son of Edward III had been brought forward by some persons not long before.¹²

Thus, Gloucester's murderer, Richard (analogously Elizabeth), is the annihilator of the ancestor through which Essex claimed his right to the crown by 'fair sequence and succession.' In the context of Richard II this is dramatically emphasized by Shakespeare's unhistorical references to Gloucester as a kind, good, and grievously wronged individual. It has been readily admitted that Thomas of Woodstock is an earlier play which presents him as a "plain well-meaning

¹²Albright, p. 696.

soul," but that work seems more the "germ" for Shakespeare's references to a martyred and heroic individual, whose murderer

Slue'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood,
Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
To me for justice and rough chastisement;
(I, i 103-106)

and who was "hack'd down, and his summer leaves all faded,
/ By envy's hand and murder's bloody axe" (I, ii, 20-21).

In fact, a number of startling similarities appear when one examines the entirety of York's speech in comparison with the history of Elizabeth's relationship with the Earl who hoped to one day possess her crown:

York. How long shall I be patient? ah, how long
Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?
Not Gloucester's death, nor Herford's banishment,
Nor Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs,
Nor the prevention of Poor Bolingbroke
About his marriage, nor my own disgrace,
Have ever made me sour my patient cheek,
(II, i, 163-169)

Albright has asserted that Essex's 1599 appointment to Ireland was in fact banishment, and supplies his own letter of September 14, 1596 written to his intimate friend Antonio Perez, the Portuguese pretender. Essex is referring to himself in the third person:

"He was returned," say they, "sunburnt, bearded,
and devoted to business of state. He has made his
friend and uncle Comptroller and Privy Councillor.
Then let him be banished under the appearance of
giving him military command. Let Ireland be entrusted
to him, an army assigned to him. If he will but

depart let him make his own conditions." But he foresees their tricks, asks advice of the Queen, offers his services, but yet reveals to her Majesty with what intent his enemies thus burden him with praises, and would fain send him on that errand. The upshot is, he is retained at home.¹³

It would appear that the Earl was correct in his suspicions, for Joseph Allen Matter reports in his My Lords and Lady of Essex: Their State Trials (1969) that Essex was not permitted to return from Ireland of his own volition:

He requested sealed permission from Elizabeth to return at will after a year, and Chamberlain wrote Carleton on March 15, 1599, that although the Earl had all his demands, the Queen showing herself very gracious and willing to content him, the clause of liberty to return at pleasure was not inserted in the patent.¹⁴

Essex's rash return from Ireland, his ineptness in handling the rebel Tyrone, and his extravagances in knighting many of his friends (thus leading Elizabeth to believe he was trying to build up adherents for an attempt against her government) all combined to lead to his initial arrest.¹⁵ Matter also reports that Essex was extremely popular with the common people, to the point where Elizabeth feared him.¹⁶

¹³Albright, p. 696.

¹⁴Joseph Allen Matter, My Lords and Lady of Essex: Their State Trials (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969), pp. 11-12.

¹⁵Matter, p. 12.

¹⁶Matter, p. 4.

- and it should here be remembered that Shakespeare's Bolingbroke is unhistorically popular.

It should be noted too, that William Sanders wrote at the time that he had seen letters between Essex and Francis Knollys, "by which there appears, even from the beginning of that employment, a very plain and intentional resolution in Essex to make himself master of his own ambition, and by this way and means to effect it."¹⁷

Since these letters are non-extant, and the reporter of them was strongly pro-sovereign - perhaps thus feeling a need to be anti-Essex - the point remains open to conjecture. Yet no matter if it was his brash return from the disastrous Irish campaign, or his perceived threat to the throne that landed him in difficulties, he certainly must have learned that a word or sentence from the Queen determined his very future!

Bol. How long a time lies in one little word!
Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
End in a word: Such is the breath of Kings.
(X, iii, 213-215)

While York's line "Nor the prevention of poor Bolingbroke / about his marriage ..." may well be an error on the playwright's part - simply recalling Holinshed but failing to elucidate the point, as was suggested above - Albright has emphasized its applicability to Essex's marriage of

¹⁷Matter, p. 12.

1590.¹⁸ However, it would seem more likely that if it was taken as a current reference it would be as a general comment upon Elizabeth's propensity to refuse marriage to her familiars, rather than her specific relations with the Earl.

In 1561 she had refused the right of Walter, Viscount Hereford, to marry Lettice Knollys (the widow of the first Earl Essex) because she had been a lady of her court and Hereford her counsellor;¹⁹ and in that same year she managed to have Lady Jane Grey's marriage to the Earl of Hertford declared invalid as she perceived it a political threat.²⁰ Ironically, by 1590, Elizabeth was angered, but was not upset for any extended period of time over Essex's secret marriage to the widow of Sir Philip Sidney:

The Queen stamped and raged and roared when she heard of Essex's marriage. Yet by her own standards her fury was curiously short lived. After a fortnight of petulance she welcomed the Earl of Essex to her side again, and even went so far as to acknowledge his new wife - a concession Leicester had never wrung from her.²¹

This greatly contrasts with Sir Walter Raleigh's imprisonment in 1595 for secretly marrying one of Elizabeth's

¹⁸Albright, pp. 695-696.

¹⁹Albright, p. 696.

²⁰Mandell Creighton, Queen Elizabeth (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966), p. 47.

²¹Robert Lacey, Robert, Earl of Essex: An Elizabethan Icarus (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 80.

maids of honour,²² and the similar fate which befell the Earl of Southampton (who served with Essex in Ireland, and who was his closest adherent in the rebellion of 1601) for secretly marrying her lady-in-waiting in 1599.²³

Another point in York's speech which may have been perceived as critical of Elizabeth occurs in the following lines:

His hands were guilty of no kindred blood,
But bloody with the enemies of his kin.
(II, i, 182-184)

Albright felt that this was probably a reminder of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots.²⁴ Since she had been dead eight years it would seem more likely that this accusation is meant solely to emphasize the murder of Gloucester, which occurs before Richard II opens and which, as has been seen, is the mainspring behind the dramatic action of the play.

A more general area of criticism, if not advice directed at the Queen, occurs in the "garden scene" of III, iv:

Go thou, and like an executioner
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
All must be even in our government.
(III, iv, 33-36)

²²Lacey, p. 97.

²³Lacey, p. 217.

²⁴Albright, p. 696.

... Superfluous branches
 We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
 Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
 Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.
 (III, iv, 63-66)

Neglected by Albright, these passages could obviously be deemed advice for the monarch of 1595, concerning her relationship with Essex. This is heightened by the fact that the entire scene - germ and all - belongs solely to Shakespeare's invention.²⁵ It is ironic that by the time of Essex's execution on February 25th, 1601, Elizabeth would doubtless find such a passage instructive in a play which the Earl's supporters thought to be politically volatile, but which ultimately provided the correct advice for quelling their ambition.

That by 1599 the subject of Richard II was openly perceived as a vehicle for a critique of current politics is evidenced both by the imprisonment of Hayward, and the previously mentioned popularity of his work. (G.B. Harrison, in The Life and Death of Robert Devereux Earl of Essex (1937), notes that "The book was far too popular, and although

²⁵R. Levitsky, "Another Germ of the Garden of Scene of Richard II?" Shakespeare Quarterly, 24 (1975), 467.

suppressed, a surreptitious edition had been printed and many copies were abroad."²⁶)

Despite the title of Henry IIII, the book undeniably focuses on the reign of Richard II, with 97 of 149 pages concerning Richard. That the purpose of the book was to comment on current politics is evidenced both by its dedication to Essex:

Great thou art in hope, greater in the expectation
of future time.²⁷

and by the introduction to the work, signed by an anonymous writer initialling himself "A.P.":

Among all sortes of humane writers, there is none that haue done more profit, or deserved greater prayse, then they who haue committed to faithfull recordes of Histories, eyther the gouernment of mighty states, or the liues and actes of famous men: for by describing the order and passages of these two, and what euenths hath followed what counsailes they haue set foorth vnto vs, not only precepts, but liuely patterns, both for priuate directions and affayres of state: wheréby in shorte tyme young men may be instructed; and ould men more fullie furnished with experience then the longest age of man can affoorde.²⁸

²⁶G.B. Harrison, The Life and Death of Robert Deveraux, Earl of Essex (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937), p. 157).

²⁷Heffner, p. 758.

²⁸Hayward, p. A3.

It is notable that neither of these statements was present (or would be officially required to be present until 1629²⁹) when the book was licensed:³⁰

The Council were still unsatisfied, and next the Attorney [Attorney General Coke] turned on the Rev. Samuel Harsnett, Chaplain to the Bishop of London, for Hayward had defended himself by saying that Harsnett officially allowed the book. Harsnett acted for the Bishop, who was partly responsible for the censorship of the press, and had been slack in his duty, for the book was brought to him rather casually, without its prefatory matter, and he passed it without troubling to read it. The wretched chaplain was greatly distressed.³¹

However, it was not only because of the prefatory remarks that Hayward was ultimately imprisoned. At his trial, Attorney General Coke noted:

... that the Doctor selected a story 200 years old, and published it last year, intending the application of it to this time, the plot being that of a King who is taxed for misgovernment, and his council for corrupt and covetous dealings for private ends; the King is censured for conferring benefits on hated favourites, the nobles become discontented, and the commons groan under continual taxation, whereupon the king is deposed, and in the end murdered.³²

Clearly this synopsis bears a resemblance to Shakespeare's play. However, there is no evidence that

²⁹Patterson, p. 48.

³⁰Albright, p. 700.

³¹Harrison, p. 267.

³²Albright, p. 703.

the Queen or her counsellors connected Hayward's work with Richard II (which appeared in Quarto version that very same year). This becomes increasingly curious when one takes into account the following conversation noted by Daphne DuMaurier in her Golden Lads: A Study of Anthony Bacon, Francis and Their Friends (1975):

The Queen: It hath some mischevous author, other than he whose name is upon it. I will have him racked to produce the real author.

Francis: Nay, Madam, he is a doctor, never rack his person, but rack his style; let him have pen, ink, and paper, and help of books, and be enjoined to continue the story where it breaketh off, and I will undertake by collecting the styles to judge whether he were the author or no.³³

While Bacon did not follow through on his jocular promise, and no other person was ever implicated, there exist a number of parallels between Hayward's and Shakespeare's works which have largely been ignored or dismissed by twentieth century critics in much the fashion of Margaret Dowling in her "Sir John Hayward's Troubles Over His Life of Henry IV" (1931):

It is, of course, very possible that the poet and the historian had each treated the same subject with imagination, and that the results were similar. But, it is pleasant to think that the pages of Hayward,

³³Daphne DuMaurier, Golden Lads: A Study of Anthony Bacon, Francis and Their Friends (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), p. 225.

the adroer of ancient authorities, were perhaps enlivened by a memory of lines by Shakespeare.³⁴

While not fully agreeing with the conclusions drawn by Albright, Peter Ure is one of the few critics to note what he calls 'a number of reasonably good parallels' [including II. i, 113, 246, 250, II. iii, 119-21, IV. i, 130, V. ii, 18, V. v, 77-80, V. vi, 34; 38]. He concludes:

But when all is said, and bearing in mind the evidence for the priority in date of Shakespeare's play - which had enjoyed two reprints in 1598, the year when Hayward, according to Coke's account of what he said, began to compose his Henry IV - it seems reasonable to conclude that the play was a source for that troublesome little work. This was the conclusion that Chambers reached, though without going into the details. Hayward and his 'cause celebre' must therefore be regarded, from our point of view, as part of the history of Shakespeare's reputation at the turn of the century.³⁵

The link between the play, Hayward's book, and the rebellion of the Earl of Essex becomes even stronger when one considers what was apparently a performance of Shakespeare's Richard II on the eve of the Essex rebellion in 1601. The first critic to note any relationship between the two works and the rebels was Richard Simpson, who, in 1858, stated:

... The supporters of Essex, to avoid suspicion, held their deliberations at Drury House, the residence of Lord Southampton, Shakespeare's patron. Some

³⁴Margret Dowling, "Sir John Hayward's Troubles Over His Life of Henry IV," The Library, 4th ser., 11 (1931), 220.

³⁵Ure, p. lxii.

means were, however, needed to stir the popular discontent and to familiarize the public mind with the idea, if not of deposing Elizabeth, at least of making Essex practically supreme. At that time political movements were not begotten by theories, arguments on the rights of people, or abstract principles, but by precedents, privileges and charters. An example was then required of how a tyrannical, usurping sovereign might be coerced, and this was furnished by Shakespeare's play of Richard II.

Dr. Hayward had already composed, with the same end, a history of the deposition of that monarch, and had dedicated it to Essex, but it was altogether too dry and prosaic for the stage. Shakespeare's play presents the same theme and moral cast in dramatic form.³⁶

It is interesting to note that Simpson linked Shakespeare and Essex on grounds of Catholicism - stating that the poet's mother, Mary Arden, was of old Catholic stock, and through her he was connected with the Montagues (Browne), Catesbys, and Throckmortons: all leading Catholic families, and distantly with the Earl of Southampton (his munificent friend and patron³⁷). Upon the subject of the rebellion, Simpson concludes:

The Earls of Rutland, Montgale; Sir John Davies, C. Danvers, C. Blount; Robert Catesby and William Green, both Warwickshire men; John Arden, the poet's connection; John Wheeler, John Shakespeare's friend and fellow-recusant, all Catholics, were among those involved in the consequences of the conspiracy.³⁸

³⁶Richard Simpson, The Religion of Shakespeare, ed. Henry Sebastian Bowden (London: Burns and Oates Limited, 1899), pp. 99-100.

³⁷Simpson, p. 66.

³⁸Simpson, p. 102.

There may be some validity to this connection, for
as Matter found in his My Lords and Lady of Essex:

An instance of official doctoring of evidence appears in a letter in the Essex papers in the State Paper Office, written by Secretary Cecil to Coke, telling him, in reading Blount's confession at the trial, to omit certain words which might have reflected unfavourably on the government. Again, in reading Blount's confession at the trial, his answer to the question whether Essex had not told him that if Essex came to authority there should be a toleration for religion was read as saying that he "should have been to blame to have denied it." There was not read the remainder of the sentence, in which was the explanation: "for in the Earl's usual talk he was wont to say that he liked not that any man should be troubled for his religion". These words had been marked for omission by Coke, and similar omissions were frequent.³⁹

While such a link is ultimately conjectural, certain it is that Shakespeare's company - the Lord Chamberlain's Men - were requested by Essex's followers to perform on the eve of the Essex rebellion. In the case against Sir Gilly Merrick - one of the Earl's chief conspirators - the prosecutor stated the following:

And the story of Henry IV being set forth in a play and in that play, there being set forth the killing of the king upon a stage: the Friday before, Sir Gilly and some of others of the Earl's train having an humour to see a play; they must needs have the play of Henry IV. The players told them that it was stale, they should get nothing by playing of that, but no play else would serve.⁴⁰

³⁹Matter, p. 61.

⁴⁰Albright, p. 688.

With remuneration from Essex's followers (forty shillings⁴¹) the play was performed; and that its focus was the reign of Richard II is evidenced by the testimony of the player called at Essex's trial, Augustine Phillips, who referred to it as "the deposing and killing of Richard II"⁴² (It should be noted that neither at the trial of Hayward, nor the trials of Essex, is Shakespeare called to give evidence.) Sir Francis Bacon confirmed Phillips' testimony in his Practices and Treasons Attempted and Committed by Robert, Earl of Essex, and His Complices (1601):

It was given in evidence ... that the afternoon before the rebellion, Mer[r]ick with a great company of others that afterwards were all in the action, had procured to be played before them the play of deposing Richard the Second. Neither was it casual, but a play bespoken by Mer[r]ick.⁴³

While the subject matter of the performance may be clear, whether or not it was Shakespeare's Richard II has not been universally agreed upon. C.A. Greer in "The Play Performed at the Globe on 7 February, 1601" (1952) felt that a deposition which could not be printed in 1595 certainly could not be performed at the Globe in 1601, and therefore a different play must have been performed to suit the ends of the conspirators. He further argues that Merrick's

⁴¹Ure, p. lvii.

⁴²Albright, p. 688.

⁴³Albright, p. 690.

saying it was "of King Harry the fourth, and of the killing of King Richard II" emphasizes a Henry rather than a Richard play. Even with the deposition scene, Greer felt the play aroused too much sympathy for the deposed king to suit the rebels' cause,⁴⁴ and he concluded:

Moreover, if the play performed on 7 February had been Shakespeare's, Shakespeare would have fared no better than Hayward. It would have been he instead of Hayward that would have been called in to explain his connection with the Essex cause. It would have been he instead of Hayward that would have been called into prison. But there is no evidence whatsoever that he was involved in the affair.⁴⁵

However, the general critical consensus is that the deposition scene was performed at the Globe in 1601.⁴⁶ Further, the title page contains the lines "With new additions of the Parlia- / ment Sceane, and the deposing / of King Richard, / As it hath been lately acted by the Kinges / Maiesties seruantes, at the Globe"⁴⁷ - though how 'lately' is unclear.

Merrick's statement that it was a play "of King Harry the fourth, and of the killing of King Richard II" can hardly be said to prove a Henry rather than a Richard

⁴⁴C.A. Greer, "The Play Performed at the Globe on 7 February, 1601," Notes and Queries, 497 (1952), 270.

⁴⁵Greer, p. 271.

⁴⁶Ure, p. xiv.

⁴⁷Ure, p. xiv.

play in light of the evidence already presented concerning the subject of the performance, and the fact that it was indeed the very ruse attempted to disguise the nature of Hayward's book.

The question of why Richard II would be chosen by Essex's men when it raises such sympathy for the deposed monarch is a critical problem often raised in this century. Lily B. Campbell, in her Shakespeare's Histories (1947), confessed, "I do not know the answer to the riddle";⁴⁸ and as recently as 1975, S. Schoenbaum stated in "Richard II and the Realities of Power," "It seems an odd choice to rouse the rabble."⁴⁹ Certainly its performance does not seem to have helped the rebellion.

Yet such critical responses ignore the topical references in the play - particularly those analogous to Elizabeth and Essex. As Albright noted as early as 1927:

Those who object to the identification of that play [February 7th, 1601] with Shakespeare's Richard II have pointed out that, while Richard is portrayed as a weak and faulty king and the deposition seems a fairly natural result of his shortcomings, yet the dramatist shows sympathy for him. But when we remember the charge made by the queen and her lawyers that Hayward in describing Richard's faults and his reign reflected upon Elizabeth, then, I think, we must notice in Shakespeare's play a number of passages where Elizabeth might well feel that she herself was being criticized, by analogy,

⁴⁸Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories, pp. 211-212.

⁴⁹Schoenbaum, p. 2.

particularly when she recognized such an analogy in Hayward's history.⁵⁰

Shakespeare's Richard II might certainly be, as Augustine Phillips put it at Essex's trial in 1601, "so old and out of use that they should have small or no company at it." But the players were nevertheless "content to play it."⁵¹ While this was the same defence that was unavailingly offered by Hayward concerning his Henry VIII, the players were exonerated of all treasonable intent. While not completely provable, it seems reasonable to accept the general critical assumption that it was indeed Shakespeare's play performed on 7 February 1601.⁵²

It is interesting to note that in 1601 both Attorney General Coke and the Queen herself would invoke the dangerous analogy. The former would do so at Essex's trial in response to Southampton's question of what the Attorney thought the rebels were planning to do when they reached the Queen:

I protest upon my soul, and in my conscience, I do believe she should not have lived long after she had been in your power. Note but the precedents of former ages: How long lived King Richard the Second after he was surprised in the same manner? The pretense there also was to remove certain Councillors; but it shortly cost the king his life. Such is the unquenchable thirst of ambition, never satisfied so long as any greatness is unachieved.

⁵⁰Albright, p. 692.

⁵¹Ure, p. lviii.

⁵²Ure, p. lviii.

But I know this for certain, that to surprise the court or take the tower by way of defense from private enemies, is plain treason.⁵³

Elizabeth's use of the analogy would come shortly after the trial, in a conversation reported by William Lambard:

That which passed from the Excellent Majestie of Queen ELIZABETH in her Privie Chamber at East Greenwich, 4th Augusti 1601, 43rd Reg. sui, towards WILLIAM LAMBARD.

He presented her Majestie with his Pandecta of all her rolls, bundells, membranes, and parcels that be reposed in her Majesties Tower at London; whereof she had given to him the charge 21st January last past ... she proceeded to further pages, and asked where she found cause to stay ... so her Majestie fell upon the reign of King Richard II. saying, "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?"

W.L. "Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind Gent the most adorned creature that ever your Majestie made."

Her Majestie. "He that will forget God, will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40th times in open streets and houses."⁵⁴

While some twentieth century critics (such as Chambers⁵⁵) have argued that this is a reference to Shakespeare's play, others (such as Heffner⁵⁶) have argued in favour of a tragical recitation of Hayward's Henry VIII. There is no concrete

⁵³Matter. p. 57.

⁵⁴Ure, p. lix.

⁵⁵Chambers, William Shakespeare, pp. 354-355.

⁵⁶Heffner, p. 772.

evidence pointing in either direction, and one must agree with Peter Ure when he notes:

- Of course, the Queen may have muddled this kind of thing with the one performance at the Globe in February, and included them both in her anathema - her phraseology is ambiguous enough to apply to one or the other or both; but there is no reason why the commentators should follow her example.⁵⁷

What the reference does provide are words from Elizabeth's lips confirming both the analogy between her and Richard II, and the subsequent popularity of the subject of Richard's reign. It was an analogy which received official acknowledgement with the arrest of Hayward in 1599, and an analogy which had doubtless provided Shakespeare's Richard II with much of its printed success. Given the argument made by Ure that it was a source for Henry VIII, and the general critical assumption that it was the play performed on the eve of the Essex rebellion, the question of why Hayward was arrested and remained in the Tower until after Elizabeth's death, while Shakespeare and his company escaped penalties, remains to be explained.

⁵⁷Ure, p. lxi.

CHAPTER V

A NECESSARY FUNCTIONAL AMBIGUITY

As a means of explaining how Shakespeare's company avoided repercussion, Albright's article "Shakespeare's Richard II and the Essex Conspiracy" (1927), simply offers "Perhaps their patron, the Chamberlain, was clever enough to extricate them from their difficulties";¹ and goes no further. In his article "Shakespeare, Hayward and Essex", (1930), Ray Heffner responds that

... although the Lord Chamberlain's influence was far-reaching, it was hardly powerful enough to obtain a pardon for such habitual criminals as Elizabeth seemed to think the players in question to be.²

Certainly the Chamberlain, who was one of the commissioners at Essex's June 5, 1600 trial for errors in Ireland,³ had a great deal of covert influence at court; and given that the company bearing his name was once again playing at court a fortnight after the rebellion, its members could hardly have been perceived as "habitual criminals."

¹Albright, p. 690.

²Heffner, p. 772.

³Albright, p. 691.

E.K. Chambers believed the Chamberlain's influence was much more far-reaching than Heffner allowed:

... the Lord Chamberlain was never far from the royal chair. The Hunsdons, father and son, were Elizabeth's nearest cousins and her close personal adherents. Of all the court, they could least be suspected of sympathy with seditious tendencies. It was easy enough to slip in a word to save honest men from the consequences of their indiscretions.⁴

A similar suggestion was more recently made by W. Nicholas Knight in his Shakespeare's Hidden Life (1975) and reaffirmed by S. Schoenbaum in his "Richard II and the Realities of Power" (1975):

Shakespeare and his fellows do not seem to have got into any trouble at all, which is odd if he was up to mischief similar to that for which Hayward was tried ... perhaps some neutral party, high up, intervened to get Shakespeare off the hook. Such a party has lately been suggested in the person of the keeper of the Rolls, the same William Lambard to whom Elizabeth made her famous protestation.⁵

Given what has been seen as the smallness of the literary and aristocratic society in Elizabethan England, the argument that some official such as the Chamberlain or Lambard interceded on the players' behalf is admissible; if conjectural.

A more definitive answer comes from a closer analysis of the texts of Hayward's Henry III and Shakespeare's Richard II. While both works present similar concepts, Henry III

⁴Chambers, William Shakespeare, p. 68.

⁵Schoenbaum, p. 9.

is far more overtly critical of Richard and his reign than is Richard II; and with its dedication and introduction Hayward's book becomes a severe critique of current politics, for example, it provides a direct explanation of the murder of Gloucester:

The Duke of Gloucester, was so greatly fauoured, that it was thought a point both of policie and peace, notto bring him to his open answere, but to put him to death secreately: so he was strangled vnder a fether bedde at Calice by the Earle of Nottingham, being then Earle Marshall: which death, howsoeuer he deserued; yet dying as he did, not called, not heard, he died as guiltlesse.⁶

And of the favourites:

These were then in all the credite and authoritie with the King, and his chiefest School-masters both of crueltie and deceite: they were proude, arrogant, and ambitious, and vppon confidence of the King's fauoure, professed enemies to men of auncient Nobility.⁷

Not only does Hayward's printed text contain a deposition scene (which, it will be remembered, Shakespeare's quartos before the death of Elizabeth did not), but it is one in which Richard publicly reads thirty-one of his offences (two more than even Holinshed presented⁸). It concludes:

I willingly yeeld to your desires, and am heere come to dispossesse my selfe of all publike authority

⁶Hayward, p. 40.

⁷Hayward, p. 39.

⁸Holinshed, pp. 859-861.

and title, and to make it free and lawfull for you to create for your King, Henrie Duke of Lancaster my cousin germaine, whom I know to be as worthe to take that place, as I see you willing to giue it to him.⁹

In contrast, Shakespeare's deposition scene is far more sympathetic to Richard, presenting the passing of the crown upon the stage in the following fashion:

Bol. Are you contented to resign the crown?

Rich. Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be. Therefore no "no", for I resign to thee. Now, mark me how I will undo myself. I give this heavy weight from off my head, And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand, The pride of kingly sway from out my heart; With mine own tears I wash away my balm, With mine own hands I give away my crown, With mine own tongue deny my sacred state, With mine own breath release all duteous oaths; All pomp and majesty I do forswear; My manors, rents, revenues, I forgo; My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny. God pardon all oaths that are broke to me God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee! Make me, that nothing have, with nothing grieved, And thou with all pleas'd, that hast all achiev'd. Long may'st thou live in Richard's seat to sit, And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit. God save King Henry, unking'd Richard says, And send him many years of sunshine days! What more remains?

(IV, i, 200-222)

When pressed by Northumberland to read the list of accusations, Richard refuses, and Bolingbroke urges it forgotten. While this is arguably for purely dramatic reasons - they would be far too long for Shakespeare to include - the result

⁹Hayward, pp. 87-88.

is that one is presented with a far more sympathetic disposition in Richard II than in Henry III.

The most damaging section of Hayward's book is a lengthy dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury (a character not in Shakespeare's play) and Bolingbroke, in which the Archbishop complains of Richard's tyranny, and begs the young man to be the champion of rebellion:

...And therefore we are now compelled to shake off our shoulders this importable yoke, and submit our selves to the squeraightie of some more moderate and worthy person... But to whom should we complaine? what succour, whose ayde should we desire? you are the only man, who in right should, and in wisdom can, and in goodnesse will (we hope) relieue vs.¹⁰

This is followed by another speech of the Archbishop's, in which he cites a number of wholly justified and successful usurpations. Hayward admitted to inventing these conversations, but attempted to defend himself by adding that later in the narrative they were confuted by the Bishop of Carlisle.¹¹

Contrastingly, nowhere in Richard II is Bolingbroke actually asked to usurp the throne - he merely seems to do so through a necessary political pragmatism. Further, there is no justification of usurpation in terms of historical figures; rather, he has Richard say the following about his past:

¹⁰Hayward, p. 63.

¹¹Harrison, p. 266.

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
 How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
 Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd,
 All murder'd - for within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king
 Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
 Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
 To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
 (III, ii, 155-165)

It would seem that Shakespeare's play contains a far more balanced presentation of the tragic and political elements of Richard's story. And it is because this balance is so carefully achieved that the poet was able to comment on current politics, was able to have his play printed (albeit without the deposition scene), and performed (perhaps with the deposition scene) from 1595 to 1601. In order to have his play printed and performed at all, Shakespeare would, indeed, have been required by the authorities to achieve such a balance. In a recent book entitled The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England (1984), Annabel Patterson stated:

...for what we find everywhere apparent and widely understood, from the middle of the sixteenth century in England, is a system of communication in which ambiguity becomes a creative and necessary instrument, a social and cultural force of considerable consequence... It has been frequently pointed out that legislated control of the press by such mechanisms as prepublication licensing tends to be virtually impossible to enforce; given the various stratagems to which writers could resort to evade the laws... But there is a whole range of publishing in England that can be better accounted for by assuming some degree of cooperation and understanding on the part of the authorities themselves, something that goes

beyond the recognition that unenforceable laws were better than none, that the occasional imprisonment, however arbitrary, had an exemplary force. Rather, there were conventions that both sides accepted as to how far a writer could go in explicit address to the contentious issues of the day, how he could encode his opinions so that nobody would be required to make an example of him.¹²

With its dedication, its introduction, and its one-sided portrayal of the reign of Richard II, Henry VIII was a work which required that the authorities make an example of Hayward. In contrast, with its deposition scene absent from the printed quartos, and the text carefully balanced between the sympathetic tragedy of Richard, and the political commentary of the day, Richard II did not require an example to be made of Shakespeare.

That such an understood system probably also existed in terms of performance is evidenced by the sporadic arrest of playwrights throughout the last decade of the sixteenth century (including Thomas Kyd in 1593,¹³ and Ben Jonson in 1597.¹⁴) However, Shakespeare's play was sufficiently well encoded to become what Patterson calls an example of 'noncensorship':

¹²Patterson, pp. 10-11.

¹³Virginia Crocheron Gildersleeve, Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama (1908; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1961), p. 95.

¹⁴Patterson, p. 49.

I see the prevailing codes of communication, the implicit social contract between authors and authorities, as being intelligible to all parties at the time, as being a fully deliberate and conscious arrangement. This is the significance of those puzzling incidents of 'noncensorship': Elizabeth I recognized the topical meaning of a production of Richard II in 1601, the year of Essex's rebellion and two years after she had imprisoned Sir John Hayward for presuming to publish a prose history of Richard that appeared to encourage Essex; yet the players, after questioning, went free.¹⁵

However, twentieth-century critics have largely undervalued the "topical meaning" of Richard II. As early as 1908 E.K. Chambers noted:

It need hardly be said that the antithesis between Richard and Bolingbroke goes much further than politics; it rests upon one of the ultimate distinctions amongst mankind, that of the practical and artistic temperaments, the men of deeds and the men of dreams and fancies.¹⁶

In such a light, Richard has been interpreted primarily as an exemplar of royal martyrdom, finding something of a sacrificial victory in his death.¹⁷ Lily B. Campbell emphasized Richard's "last desperate struggle" as being "kingly";¹⁸ H.B. Charlton felt that Shakespeare "restores to Richard the full involuntary esteem of the audience with

¹⁵Patterson, p. 17.

¹⁶E.K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 90.

¹⁷Karl F. Thompson, "Richard II, Martyr," Shakespeare Quarterly, 8 (1957), 159.

¹⁸Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories, p. 210.

the traditional heroism of a tragic hero's death";¹⁹ and Hardin Craig found that "...in the last seconds of his life Richard II strikes an honest blow in his own defense, and we somehow feel that our belief has been justified, that somewhere in this vain and ineffectual king there was hidden the soul of a man".²⁰

However, to see Richard merely as the embodiment of an ineffective poet-king given more to verse than command, and finding a pallid victory in inactive martyrdom, is to lose oneself in the sympathy evoked for him in the last third of the play, and ignore his active misdeeds in the first third.

The importance of the murder of Gloucester as the catalyst for the dramatic action in the first three acts has already been noted. However, this is not the only important wrong emphasized in the early parts of the play. In her article "Trial by Combat and Official Irresponsibility in Richard II" (1975), Diane Bornstein claimed that in accordance with contemporary literature, Richard is being criticized for allowing the trial by combat and then stopping it - thereby offending both "Christian service and true chivalry".

¹⁹H.B. Charlerton, Shakespearean Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 46.

²⁰Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare (New York: n.p., 1948), p. 134.

(II, i, 54).²¹ More importantly, there is the seizing of Bolingbroke's lands and title in the same scene, an action by which Richard calls into question his own rights of primogeniture: "For how art thou a king/ But by fair sequence and succession?" (II, i, 198-199).

Through his actions Richard is denying the very concepts which have made him king; he has violated the principles of order and degree inherent in the Tudor doctrine, and thereby provides incentive for any contravening of that doctrine - even rebellion. In "The State of Law in Richard II" (1983), Donna B. Hamilton noted:

Through this reminder that the law makes Richard king, York is warning Richard that royal disregard for the law gives license for subjects to disobey the law. Even worse, York says, Richard's disobedience puts him in the precarious position of a ruler acting in the absence of any authority - separating himself from that which gives him power in the first place."²²

It is interesting, too, that A.L. French in "Richard II and the Woodstock Murder" (1971), thematically linked the murder of Woodstock with the removal of Hereford's rights. By stressing that it is in the speech immediately preceding York's warning concerning succession that he accuses Richard

²¹Diane Bornstein, "Trial by Combat and Official Irresponsibility in Richard II, Shakespeare Studies, 8 (1975), 131.

²²Donna B. Hamilton, "The State of Law in Richard II," Shakespeare Quarterly, 34, No. 1 (Spring 1983), 10-11.

of having hands guilty of "kindred blood", French was able to conclude:

The point York is making... is that Richard's confiscation of Gaunt's estates is tantamount to yet another murder - the extirpation of the Lancastrian Branch of the Royal family. The point is developed later (180f). Where York makes it perfectly clear that far more is at stake than Bolingbroke's merely losing wealth...²³

Thus, while Richard may well retain the private virtues of a poetic artist, he certainly lacks the public virtues of an efficient, or even law-abiding king. That such a distinction was important in Elizabethan England is evidenced by Edmund Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh prefixed to The Faerie Queene (1596):

...I have followed all the antique Poets historicall, ...and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a priuate man... By ensample of which excellent Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues,... the which is the purpose of these first twelue books: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encouraged, to frame the other part of politticke uertues in his person, after that hee came to be king.²⁴

Further, Niccolo Machiavelli - whose influence on Elizabethan thought has been critically underestimated²⁵ - went so far

²³French, p. 341.

²⁴Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, ed. Thomas P. Roche (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 16-17.

²⁵Ribner, p. 34.

as to deny the relevance of private virtues to the problems of government, stressing in The Prince (1526) the necessity of at least appearing to be a capable and active leader:

The prince must, as already stated, avoid those things which will make him hated or despised; and whenever he succeeds in this, he will have done his part, and will find no danger in other vices. He will chiefly become hated, as I said, by being rapacious, and usurping the property and women of his subjects, which he must abstain from doing; and whenever one does not attack the property or honour of the generality of men, they will live contented; and one will only have to combat the ambition of a few, who can be easily held in check in many ways. He is rendered despicable by being thought changeable, frivolous, effeminate, timid, and irresolute; which a prince must guard against as a rock of danger, and so contrive that his actions show grandeur, spirit, gravity, and fortitude; and as to the government of his subjects, let his sentence be irrevocable, and let him adhere to his decisions so that no one may think of deceiving or cozening him.²⁶

When the time comes for Shakespeare's Richard II to act publicly - to be a viable political force upon his return from Ireland, and in the face of Bolingbroke's advances - he vacillates between inactive fear and a verbal reassertion of his position as king. It is ironic that here Richard most clearly voices the commonplaces of Tudor Myth political theorizing:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord;
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,

²⁶Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince and The Discourses, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 66-67.

God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
 A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
 Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.
 (III, ii, 54-66)

However, even Richard must admit the helplessness of his situation when he receives the reports of Salisbury and Scroop:

...throw away respect,
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty;
 For you have but mistook me all this while.
 I live with bread like you, feel want,
 Taste grief, Need friends - subjected thus,
 How can you say to me, I am King?
 (III, ii, 172-7)

Of this entire scene, Irving Ribner, in "The Political Problem in Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy" (1952), has concluded:

...The proclamation of the divinity which guards a King could not carry much conviction to an audience hearing in it the futile remonstrances of a king whose cause it knows is lost. The dramatic impact of the scene is not a triumphant statement of the great truths of the Tudors. If anything, the scene illustrates the pathetic insufficiencies of these doctrines by themselves... [yet] The orthodox expression of Tudor doctrine in the lines of the scene could not have offended the Elizabethan censor. They apparently blinded him to the dramatic impact of the scene as a whole, which certainly does not lend support to the doctrines so dear to Elizabeth and her council.²⁷

In dramatic contrast to the inactive and private Richard is, of course, the active and public Bolingbroke. Significantly, we rarely see the private characteristics of the latter

²⁷Ribner, p. 38.

figure; he is a pragmatist, not a doctrinaire, and to achieve this character Shakespeare leaves his motivation deliberately obscure. Bolingbroke defines his steps only as he takes them, and those very steps are defined by Richard's actions.²⁸ In "Up, Cousin, Up, Your Heart is Up, I Know" (1956) Brents Stirling felt that:

Never in sixteenth-century drama were motives disclosed with such economy and understatement. The Elizabethan stage character with a moral contradiction usually explains his flaw before, during, and after the events - and at length. Until the short choric "confession" at the very end of the play, Bolingbroke, however, shows his deviousness at telling intervals and occurring in contexts which are effectively similar.²⁹

Bolingbroke is the quintessential Machiavellian, allowing to be seen only that which he wishes to be seen, and having others perform the dirty work. It is Northumberland, for example, who is sent to bargain with Richard at Flint castle, and who does not fall to his knees in front of the sovereign. It is Northumberland too, who has the Bishop of Carlisle arrested for treason, and urges Richard to read the list of his wrongs. Yet there can be no doubt as to who is in control of the rebel forces, or indeed of the entire political situation. (In fact, throughout the scene

²⁸Coursen, p. 77.

²⁹Brents Stirling, "Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know," in Unity in Shakespearean Tragedy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Richard II", ed. Paul M. Cubeta (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 96.

Bolingbroke adopts the royal "we" before he is crowned King.)

This inherent power of Bolingbroke goes back to III, iv,

where it is first ironically recognized by Richard himself:

Rich. Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee
To make the base earth proud with kissing it.
Me rather had my heart might feel your love,
Than my displeased eye see your courtesy.
Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know,
Thus high at least, although your knee be low.

...
Well you deserve. They well deserve to have
That know the strong'st and surest way to get.
Uncle, give me your hands; nay, dry your eyes -
Tears show their love, but want their remedies.
Cousin, I am too young to be your father,
Though you are old enough to be my heir;
What you will have, I'll give, and willing too,
For do we must what force will have us do.
Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?

Bol. Yea, my good Lord.

Rich. Then I must not say no.
(III, iv, 190-195, 205-210)

Stirling sees the king's line "Set on towards London,
cousin it is so?" an ironic statement exposing:

...a long course of equivocation which the rebels seem
to have concealed even from themselves. And in fact,
Bolingbroke is still trying to conceal it; his short
answer is the minimum assertion of his motives, an
opportunistic spurious appeal to what "must be" in order
to avoid a statement of purpose.³⁰

In effect, coming after his statement of loyalty and subjection,

"Yea, my good lord" provides a climactic expression and

clarification of Bolingbroke's intent. As always, however,

³⁰Stirling, p. 97. °

Bolingbroke is working with understatement rather than statement. Throughout the play he is direct and to the point; nowhere does he argue his position. Indeed, to retain his public image he backs down in the face of Richard's moving rhetoric, "Urge it no more, my lord Northumberland." (IV, i, 271); and he further provides Richard with his wish to be away "from your sights" (IV, i, 315).

It must be remembered that while Bolingbroke's popularity is an unhistorical Shakespearean invention, Shakespeare is careful not to leave the conflict completely settled in this new King's favour. Rather, Exton states that when speaking of Richard, Henry said "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?" (V, iv, 2). This story is then corroborated by the fact that Henry spoke the words twice, with the servant to whom Exton is speaking providing the verification:

Ser. These were his very words.

Exton. "Have I no friend?" quoth he. He spake it twice, And urg'd it twice together, did he not?

Ser. He did.

Instead of simply making Henry a hero, Shakespeare provides him with an explicit guilt at the end of the play; a guilt

which the playwright had taken pains to avoid in the case of Richard's involvement in Gloucester's death.³¹

Thus, the conflict between Richard and Bolingbroke is neither one-sided, nor simple. The first to emphasize its importance was E.M.W. Tillyard, who stated that:

...although reputed so simple and homogeneous a play, [it] is built on a contrast. The world of medieval refinement is indeed the main object of presentation, but it is threatened and in the end superseded by the more familiar world of the present.³²

Yet, if one notes the political applicability of the play, and the fact that it is hardly the reassertion of Tudor doctrine which Tillyard believed it was, it would seem that Richard II goes beyond an illumination of separate historical periods to a representation and critique of the exercise of power in a modern political world. Shakespeare's play is, in effect, an historical analysis of the movement from innocent Mediaeval politics to a modern Machiavellian

³¹H.M. Richmond, Shakespeare's Political Plays (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967), p. 139.

³²Tillyard, p. 259.

pragmatism,³³ from rhetorical and traditional royalty to a direct and power-oriented political force.³⁴

It is John of Gaunt who presents the ideal Mediaeval political response - a response not unlike the one called for by the doctrines of Tudor passive obedience:

Gaunt. God's is the quarrel - for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death; and which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.
(I, ii, 37-41)

As Henry Kelly, in Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories (1970), stated:

In these words of Gaunt, Shakespeare would seem to be setting up a code of morality by which subsequent events of the play are to be judged, if we can infer such a meaning from Gaunt's character which is unalloyed with any unworthy motives.³⁵

Indeed, by the time Gaunt presents the ideal order in which such a political response could effectively exist (II, i, 40-68), it has become something of an era that is

³³Richmond, p. 139.

³⁴Derek Traversi, "Richard II," in his An Approach to Shakespeare (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969); rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Richard II," ed. Paul M. Cubeta (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 41.

³⁵Henry Kelly, Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 204.

a paradise lost. The "royal throne of Kings," the "other Eden, demi-paradise," has been "leas'd out" by Richard, "Like to a tenement or pelting farm." Throughout the first two Acts the actuality of Richard's reign is directly contrasted with Gaunt's ideal,³⁶ and after Gaunt's speech the characters are no longer placed in a social hierarchy, but are left in a new and competitive political fabric.

It is Bolingbroke, with quick, decisive action and the manipulation of public opinion, who becomes the champion of this new era - an era which has been seen to be very much like Elizabethan England in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Perhaps the finest example of Bolingbroke's ability occurs in V, iii, a scene which most critics have wrongfully called extraneous, and which is almost always omitted in performance.³⁷ In it one finds Henry dealing with insurrection in the most politically mature manner presented in the play. With customary dispatch the new king pardons Aumerle and then permits the entrance of the Duke and Duchess of York, whom he allows, for public-relations sake, to act out their old-fashioned rite of pardon.

Here the Yorks clearly symbolize the absurdity of attempting to apply the Mediaeval political attitude in

³⁶Henninger, p. 319.

³⁷Ribner, p. 35.

a modern political world. The Duke is willing to have his son put to death for plotting against the monarch, just as Gaunt was willing to accept his son's banishment in the first Act. However, what was noble in a Mediaeval political hierarchy is absurd in a political world based on the competition for power. In effect, Shakespeare is presenting his audience with an analysis of the effective use of power in a political fabric very much like his own. But the playwright is once again careful to balance his play, for by the end of this Act sympathy for Richard is at its height with his murder; and Henry, although victorious, is left uneasy and guilty:

I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.
March sadly after; grace my mournings here
In weeping after this untimely bier.

(V, vi, 49-52)

And so it is throughout the entire play. In the first two Acts Richard's wrongs are stressed to the point of justification for Bolingbroke's right to usurp; and in the last two Acts, as Henry's power grows, so does the sympathy evoked for Richard. It is a delicate balance between a declaration of the divine right of kings and an act of usurpation, between sympathetic tragedy and modern political necessity. Nowhere does Shakespeare tip the scales. In

the terminology of Annabel Patterson, Richard II is functionally ambiguous.³⁸

It is because of this functional ambiguity that Shakespeare's play has been interpreted in a variety of ways. It was written in 1595 with a great deal of current political commentary, yet with the removal of the deposition scene it contained enough Tudor doctrine and sympathy for the deposed King to be passed by the authorities. Between 1595 and 1600, with the increase in the sensitivity of the analogy between Richard II and Elizabeth I, the play could grow in printed and performed popularity without being suppressed. Its political commentary, and its unhistorical presentation of Bolingbroke as a popular hero explain why the followers of Essex saw in Richard II both a political justification and inspiration for their actions. Yet this "old" and "out of date" play is so balanced between sympathetic tragedy and necessary political action that even after its performance on the eve of the Essex rebellion in 1601 it would not be viewed by the authorities as an act of sedition on the part of the Chamberlain's Men, or indeed, of Shakespeare himself.

As late as 1680 Nahum Tate would attempt to rework the play to make it applicable to current politics - even going so far as to rename it The Sicilian Usurper in order

³⁸Patterson, p. 18.

to have it passed by the authorities. And that he was to some degree successful is evidenced by its being banned by the Lord Chamberlain on December 14, 1680.³⁹

As has been seen, however, twentieth century critics have generally underestimated the political element of the play, preferring to emphasize its tragic qualities. Yet this is to look at only half of a delicate balance between tragedy and political theory - a balance permitting Richard II to operate as a cautionary tale within the area of functional ambiguity. Having achieved this artistic success, Shakespeare was able to comment without repercussion both on current politics and the nature of successfully wielding power in a modern political world much like that of Elizabethan England in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

³⁹Wilson, p. lxxix.

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